



Tab 8 COVID-19 Update

Coordinating Board for Higher Education
December 9, 2020

BACKGROUND

During summer 2020, the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) created the Higher Education (HiEd) Support Microcell as part of the state's Fusion Cell response to COVID-19. This microcell was created to provide support to higher education institutions as classes resumed in the fall, and to help institutions keep campuses open throughout the entire school year.

CURRENT STATUS

The HiEd Microcell is made up of DHEWD staff and meets daily. This microcell partners with other agencies, including the Department of Health & Senior Services (DHSS), Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and Office of Administration (OA), to complete various initiatives and projects to support higher education in COVID-19. These initiatives include:

- Weekly "Office Hours" meetings in partnership with DHSS to provide COVID-related information to institutions and answer questions.
- Providing COVID-related health, economic, and social impact related data to institutions.
- Coordinating meetings with health labs to discuss current lab tech shortages.
- Developing community testing strategies near campuses so institutions have access to community testing as part of testing strategy.
- Notifying institutions each week of community testing near their campus.
- Disseminating influenza vaccination communication campaign information to institutions.

Currently, the highest priority of the microcell is the distribution of Abbott BinaxNOW rapid antigen tests to higher education institutions. The state has received 1.84 million tests to distribute, and has allocated around 400,000 to higher education institutions. These tests are free to institutions, and may be used on symptomatic individuals. At this time, over 30 institutions have opted in to the testing program. Tests are distributed weekly to institutions, and are a valuable and much needed source of testing aid. Additionally, some institutions have reported utilizing the tests for students who do not have health insurance, providing additional safety to high-risk students who otherwise may not have access to COVID-19 testing.

Department staff are also working with other state agencies to prepare to distribute COVID-19 vaccines. The department participated in the development of the state's vaccine plan and identified several universities around the state that have the kind of ultra-cold storage needed for some vaccines. Hospitals will be the primary storage sites. Kansas City University, Lincoln University, Missouri State University, and Washington University have been identified as back-ups. Kansas City University's Joplin site, St. Louis University, the University of Central Missouri, the University of Missouri-Columbia, and the University of Missouri-St. Louis also have facilities that may be accessed if needed.

NEXT STEPS

The department will update the CBHE as the COVID-19 work continues.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an information item only.

NO ATTACHMENTS