

Wabash.

March 15, 2021

To: Wabash Community
From: President Scott Feller and Dr. Ann Taylor
Re: Community Update for March 15, 2021

We bring good news on several fronts with important caveats, and we need everyone to read both carefully. Surveillance testing was excellent again this week with all negative results. However, we did have a student develop symptoms of COVID-19 late in the week and he subsequently tested positive. This is a critically important reminder that you can have a negative test today and be infectious tomorrow! This is why we must faithfully adhere to all of our mitigation tools. A single day of skipping your symptom monitoring – or single occasion of not wearing your mask – could result in you spreading the virus.

Another piece of good news is that campus will move to blue status based on the strength of campus metrics. We are immensely proud of the accomplishments of this community. Quite frankly, when we designed the color code system, we didn't envision a scenario in which our campus conditions would be so much more favorable than the state of Indiana and neighboring colleges and universities. While we will cautiously move to blue, important concerns will need to be addressed to stay there.

One concern is the need to plan for difficult situations that may arise with guests in living units. Consequently, all living units will need to work with Student Life staff and Campus Safety and Security to formulate a plan for managing guests before they will be approved for the living unit. Student housing leaders should watch for further communication from Dean Welch about this process. Treat this week as "light blue."

A new status also brings changes to campus events and athletic competitions. Admission to athletic and other events for students, faculty, and staff using the COVID Pass app will be first come, first served up to pre-determined, physically distanced capacities. Guests at these events from outside of our health monitoring system will still be limited, pre-registered, and seated separately.

We are also tracking several worrisome trends that put our progress at risk. One is the growing proportion of more infective variants in Indiana, particularly the so-called British variant B.1.1.7 that has become dominant in some states and is expected to achieve that status in Indiana within a few weeks. A second is a trend for communities to become complacent and/or fatigued and lose sight of the 3 W's and 3 C's. The move to blue must be accompanied by even greater attention to our proven mitigation strategies to offset the risk associated with more events and guests.

The trends are especially concerning because we are seeing the bad effects play out on other campuses in real time. For example, all undergraduates at Duke University are now restricted to their rooms following a surge in infections that put over 180 students into isolation, an outbreak tied to group social activities where breakdowns in masking and distancing took place.

All of this is to say that moving to blue was not an easy decision, and there are significant concerns about the risks. We will continue to keep a close eye on what is happening in the community. If conditions change, we will move back to more restrictive conditions.

With gratitude for you and all you bring to campus,

President Scott Feller

Ann Taylor, Special Assistant to the President for COVID Response and Planning

