



# University of Massachusetts

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March 11, 2020

TO: Chairman Robert J. Manning  
Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: President Martin T. Meehan

RE: COVID-19 preparedness update

The sudden arrival and spread of the coronavirus Covid-19 has had a profound impact on life here in Massachusetts and around the world. Given the uncertainties and risks of the moment, and in keeping with our steadfast commitment to the health and safety of the members of the UMass community, the five Chancellors and I, in consultation with Chairman Manning, have decided to implement a remote teaching and learning plan to help protect our 75,000 students and 18,000 faculty and staff from the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

This morning I discussed our decision with Governor Baker, Senate President Spilka, and House Speaker DeLeo. All voiced their support for UMass as we confront this challenge.

Our highest priority is the health and safety of students, faculty, staff and communities. The complex and fast-evolving challenges posed by this virus require decisive, proactive measures, and we have an obligation to do our part in mitigating the spread of the virus here in Massachusetts. After considering the guidance we have received from state and federal health officials as well as our own infectious disease experts, it is now clear that moving our students from face-to-face learning to a remote model must be part of our contribution to the mitigation effort.

This transition follows several weeks of discussion and consultation with our teams and Governor Baker's declaration of a state of emergency. We are implementing these measures, not because there is presently any evidence that

our campuses are unsafe, but in order to make them safer. Besides the one case at UMass Boston earlier this year (this student is recovering well and has been isolated since the discovery of his illness), no additional cases have been reported on our campuses. However, proactive steps are necessary to make our campus communities safer – for the students who return home and the faculty and staff who remain. These measures will reduce the density of our campus populations, which will enable social distancing.

It is important to be clear that we are implementing an alternative instruction modality and are not closing campuses or satellite sites. Specific details of the implementation on each campus will vary depending on each campus' particular circumstances. Each campus is examining strategies to accommodate students with certain needs such as WiFi access, housing, etc.

Through April 3, classes will be taught remotely using web, video, and teleconferencing tools that are available to faculty, and are already being used in many classes throughout the UMass system. All five campuses have been preparing for this possibility over the last few weeks. We will reassess the situation as it progresses and notify students, staff and faculty by April 1 whether we need to prolong the distance learning modality beyond April 6. We are committed to ensuring to the best of our ability the progression of our students toward their degrees

We regret the disruption that this will cause, but are confident that all parties will agree that the health and safety of those who live and work at the five campuses and dozens of UMass facilities across the state must come first.

Without question, this is a public-health moment the likes of which few of us have ever seen. Our hope is that the very significant steps being taken all around us will result in the virus being brought under control with as little impact as possible. Each campus will provide detailed instructions to their own students regarding implementation of the remote learning plan.

We are also adopting the recommendations that Governor Charlie Baker made Tuesday regarding executive branch employee activities. Though not a division of the executive branch, each campus and the system office will:

- Restrict work-related foreign and domestic travel of employees and discourage personal international travel.

- Hold conferences, seminars and other discretionary gatherings virtually or cancel them.
- Continue internal business, including but not limited to mandated public hearings and board meetings.
- Discourage external work-related conferences, seminars and events. Alternatively, employees are encouraged to participate remotely.
- Discourage sick employees from coming to work.
- Encourage employees in high-risk groups (older workers, those with pre-existing conditions, etc.) to talk with supervisors about alternative work assignments.

Information about these actions will be disseminated to employees and the public today. Please visit [Massachusetts.edu/COVID19](https://www.massachusetts.edu/COVID19) for updated information of system, campus, state and federal responses to this challenge.