As we approach the end of the Fall Quarter and prepare for the Thanksgiving holiday, we write to share some updates about our recent experiences, current status and future plans as they impact faculty and staff. As you all know, the course of the pandemic is developing quickly, and any guidance we give here could change as things change around us.

**Fall Term So Far and Recent Developments**

In many ways, Fall has gone better than we expected. While our decision to limit the number of undergraduates on campus was a difficult one, it allowed us to focus on the students who were here in Evanston and Chicago and refine our health and safety practices related to COVID. For most of the term, our campus-wide COVID testing positivity remained well below 1%, and we had few members of our community self-isolating or self-quarantining at any given time.

However, we have seen the number of cases identified through our testing operations grow over the last few weeks, as community spread in the region increases rapidly. While our overall testing positivity remains manageable, at around 1.25%, it’s notable that we are seeing a more significant increase in cases for faculty and staff. As our COVID Response Team evaluates those cases, it is clear that the genesis of the cases generally have no direct connection to Northwestern, but instead result from community transmission — off-campus social gatherings, dinners or family connections.

We want to stress the importance of staying diligent, both at work and in our personal lives. We are all suffering from COVID fatigue and miss the social connections that are important to us. But we need to remember that Northwestern is not a bubble, and our personal decisions can and will spill over to our campus. Please keep following all the measures that have helped the campus operate safely in the Fall — wear your masks, social distance and stay home if you are sick. Let’s continue to exhibit the behaviors we asked of our students.
State of Illinois Stay-at-Home Advisory

As you know, on Tuesday, Gov. J.B. Pritzker issued further mitigation efforts to try to curb the spread of the virus in Illinois. This followed recent stay-at-home advisories from the City of Chicago and the City of Evanston, both of which are active through Dec. 15.

We have already asked faculty and staff who are able to do their work remotely to do so through Nov. 29. Given the advisories from the state and our Evanston and Chicago public health partners, we are asking you to continue this through the month of December. As a reminder, this applies only to those who can do their work remotely — those who need to be onsite to perform their work or research should continue to do so, while continuing to take appropriate protective measures.

The order from the governor allows universities to remain open, and specifically, some of the restrictions in the order do not apply to higher education. However, we will proactively apply many of the best practices from these guidelines, and we have recently updated 10-person limitations for meetings and events and strengthened our requirements for wearing masks while on campus.

Faculty and Staff Planning to Work On-Campus After Thanksgiving

Not all of our faculty and staff can complete their work remotely, and many will need to return to campus following Thanksgiving. Since our last message, the City of Chicago updated its emergency travel order to a new tiered system.

As nearly all states fit into the “avoid travel” category, we are amending our guidance and asking anyone who travels away from Illinois for the holiday to work remotely for two weeks following their return if they are able to. This applies to both the Chicago and Evanston campuses.

However, for faculty and staff in Evanston who need to be on campus to complete their work or research, you may return to campus after one week of working remotely if you have a negative test result, which you may obtain as noted
below. Your test should be timed 5-7 days following your return from travel. Those who work in Chicago should follow any restrictions from the City of Chicago about returning to onsite work.

**Testing for Faculty and Staff Between Nov. 30 and Dec. 18**

We are offering regular, asymptomatic testing for faculty and staff who will continue to work onsite during December. If you are working onsite, you are encouraged to book a test as frequently as once per week if you would like. The testing during this period will follow a slightly different process than you may be used to. You must book your appointments [here](#), and you will enter the Jacobs Center through the south entrance that is normally used by undergraduate students. In Chicago, you will continue to go to the same location in 345 E. Superior St. The processes for obtaining your results are outlined on the [testing website](#).

If you are symptomatic or you have been identified as being exposed to COVID-19 through contact tracing, do not go to one of the asymptomatic testing sites. Doing so may unnecessarily put your fellow employees at risk. You should follow the symptomatic testing processes outlined on the [faculty and staff testing website](#).

**Looking Forward to Winter Term**

We understand that some of you may have questions about students returning to campus in January when the conditions of the pandemic are deteriorating today. Our experience in the Fall suggests that we can create a healthy environment for our students, faculty and staff if we all work together and follow the precautions we’ve designed to protect campus.

While we will closely monitor developments daily over the next 45 days, we plan today to invite all undergraduate and graduate students back to campus and will do so as long as we feel it can be done safely. It is clear that the campus will feel different, with most courses and many co-curricular activities taking place virtually, but our students want to be back on campus and have demonstrated that they are
willing to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and the community.

With the increased density planned for campus in the Winter, and the increased community prevalence of COVID-19 in Illinois, we will continue to take steps to maintain the health of our faculty and staff who work on campus. Schools and units are currently updating their return-to-campus plans to closely monitor density in buildings across campus. As we prepare for more buildings to be regularly occupied with more people, we are ensuring signage, social distancing controls and building HVAC systems are all optimized, and spaces are consistently cleaned and prepared with masks, wipes and sanitizer stations. We will enforce the use of masks for everyone on campus, and hold accountable those who do not follow such guidelines. If you are coming to campus, you are required to use Symptomtracker each day, and badge yourself red if you have any symptoms so that the COVID Response Team can assist you with next steps.

While the steps above have proven to help create a healthy environment on campus, testing is another important tool to measure the impact of our actions alongside the transmission in our community. For the Winter, we are adding some additional testing options for faculty and staff who will be working onsite:

- We will offer a voluntary surveillance program of recurring testing designed to prioritize those individuals who are frequently present on campus and interact regularly in-person with others. Faculty and staff working on campus and willing to commit to regular testing may opt into this program;
- We will offer “ad hoc” testing appointments each day, which faculty and staff can schedule at their convenience if they would like to be tested sporadically while working on campus;
- We will continue to select a random sampling of faculty and staff each week to help detect underlying changes of the virus prevalence in our community;
- There will continue to be readily available testing for
those who have COVID-19 symptoms or who are identified through contact tracing.

We plan to launch the Winter testing website next week, at which time you can learn more about these testing options and decide if you want to enroll in the surveillance program.

Thank You

This has been one of the most challenging periods in Northwestern’s history, and in many of our lives — and it’s not over yet. We admire the dedication, compassion and understanding that you have displayed over the last few months. While this Thanksgiving will be different, we hope that you are able to disconnect from work and spend some time with your closest loved ones, whether that be in-person or virtually. Thank you for all that you do for Northwestern. And please, stay healthy.