January 13, 2022

Dear Campus Community,

The university is closely monitoring the recent COVID-19 cases affecting our campus community, Massachusetts and the nation. The latest COVID-19 testing data for the UMass community from Jan. 5-11 shows 377 new positive cases. The university's cumulative positivity rate is 7.56%, down from last week's rate of 13.21%. The state’s seven-day positivity rate is 21.61%.

The Omicron variant is now evident in all positive COVID-19 tests conducted on campus. UMass is updating its requirements for face coverings as we move forward with in-person teaching, learning and research activities for the spring semester. Everyone should use a higher-grade mask, such as KN95, KF94, or N95, or double-mask. Cloth masks are not effective in limiting the spread of Omicron and should only be used in double masking, with a close-fitting surgical mask underneath.

This past week, we learned that a UMass Amherst employee died as the result of COVID-19. This is the first time that an active employee has died from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. Our heartfelt sympathies go out to his family, friends and campus colleagues.

Starting Tuesday, Jan. 18 the Public Health Promotion Center (PHPC) will adopt the practice of providing only unobserved tests. Unobserved testing kits are available at the PHPC on the lower level of the Campus Center during PHPC operating hours. Campus kiosks for return of test kits are now open every day, 24 hours per day. Tests dropped off Monday through Thursday will have results available within 24 to 48 hours. Results from tests done on Friday through Sunday are ready the following Monday evening or Tuesday.

Please Note: Monday, Jan. 17 is Martin Luther King Jr. Day and the PHPC is closed. Results from tests done Friday through Monday this week will be ready Tuesday evening or Wednesday.

As we near the third year of the pandemic, it is clear that COVID-19 will be present for the foreseeable future. Importantly, we have learned that vaccinations, boosters and wearing masks indoors help prevent spikes of severely ill people. The current scientific data shows that those who are vaccinated and boosted and become infected are often asymptomatic or experience mild symptoms.
BOOSTER SHOTS
All eligible UMass students, faculty and staff are required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot. It is important that all those eligible receive the booster shot prior to the start of the semester. In accordance with CDC guidelines, receiving your booster shot will exempt you from the need to quarantine if you are a close contact of a positive case. You can make an appointment for a booster shot by identifying a location through the Massachusetts COVID-19 vaccine finder or Vaccines.gov.

TESTING
Advance Testing: Students, please submit your advance COVID-19 test in the mail by this Friday, Jan. 14. You also have other options to submit an advance test before the start of the semester. Faculty and Staff should take a COVID-19 PCR test by next Tuesday, Jan. 18. If you test positive, here is the process of notification and the steps you must take: Regardless of your vaccination status, you must isolate for a minimum of five days. If you have no symptoms or your symptoms are resolved after five days, you can leave your house and must wear a mask around others for five additional days. If your test was not done at UMass Amherst, you should isolate in place and report your results to the PHPC immediately at testing@umass.edu.

For individuals who take tests at UMass Amherst:

- UMass faculty, staff and students who test positive will receive an email from umalab@umass.edu with lab results. If you are positive, you must isolate immediately. The UMass Public Health Team reviews all positive results and will send follow-up information to your email address. These emails are sent out throughout the day.

- Community members who test positive will receive an email from umalab@umass.edu with lab results. Please refer to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Guidance for Isolation. If you have any questions, please contact your local board of health.

Everyone must continue to monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms each day before coming to campus. If you feel unwell, stay home.

Thank you for all you are doing to care for yourselves and one another, and to support the health of our community.

Sincerely,

Co-Directors of the Public Health Promotion Center (PHPC)
Ann Becker, Public Health Director
Jeffrey Hescock, Executive Director of Environmental Health and Safety

University of Massachusetts Amherst