UConn places entire Storrs campus under quarantine as coronavirus cases rise; in-person classes continue but gatherings prohibited

By AMANDA BLANCO

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One of the testing tents set up on campus where students made their first stop during move-in day at UConn's Storrs campus Aug. 14. (Kassi Jackson/The Hartford Courant)

UConn has placed its entire Storrs campus under quarantine as coronavirus cases continue to rise at the university and across Connecticut.

“We don’t have the COVID spread under control,” Eleanor Daugherty, associate vice president and dean of students, wrote to students in a Friday morning email. “I need us to do more to ensure that we are able to return home to our families healthy.”

All students will also be required to take a COVID-19 exit test before they leave for Thanksgiving break, and the quarantine will last until all dorms shut down for the remainder of the fall semester on Nov. 21.

“This is about family, my friends. We all want to go home and be with our loved ones,” Daugherty said. “It is essential that we return home to our families in our best health.”

The university reported 31 new COVID-19 cases among students at its Storrs campus Friday — seven among those who live on campus and 24 among those who live off campus — plus one employee who tested positive.

After reporting few COVID-19 cases in October, the school has seen a surge this week, with at least 20 new cases each of the past three days. The school now has 62 students in isolation on campus with confirmed or suspected cases. A total of 288 residential students and 181 students who live off campus have tested positive for the virus this semester.

UConn already instituted a “full” quarantine of more than 540 students in five dorms Wednesday, in an effort to mitigate the spread of confirmed cases in those halls. Students living in those dorms must follow stricter procedures including testing, takeout dining from designated quarantine dining halls and online classes.
Daugherty said Friday those full quarantine measures will be extended to students living in Busby Suites, Russell Hall, Alsop A, Fairfield Hall and Litchfield Hall. All other Storrs residential students will begin a “modified” quarantine Friday evening.

Under the modified protocols, students are permitted to “attend class in person, participate in clinical placement, and participate in essential research functions conducted at UConn,” Daugherty explained. But, “you must continue to wear masks, follow medical advice, refrain from gatherings, and remain in your rooms,” she wrote. “You may go to class or other academic activities, pick up food at the dining halls, participate in COVID testing, and go for walks outside away from other people.”

In-person student activities and use of the university’s recreation center will also be suspended, and all dining halls will move to takeout.

UConn said student-athletes whose sports are in season, including basketball and ice hockey, will remain in residence on campus and will adhere to the university’s modified quarantine guidelines. As of Thursday, the men’s basketball team remained limited to practicing two players at a time — roommates only, at opposite ends of the court, with one basketball in use. Coaches are not allowed to be involved.

“Additionally, all Tier 1 members of those teams will be tested for COVID-19 three times per week, per NCAA guidelines,” the university said. UConn is one of several schools to recently tighten health and safety protocols because of spikes in case numbers. Sacred Heart University in Fairfield shifted most classes to remote learning Monday due to concerns about rising case numbers, and all Quinnipiac University students are under a two-week quarantine. Yale University has also tightened gathering and travel restrictions for all community members.

Courant staff writer Alex Putterman contributed to this report.

Amanda Blanco can be reached at ablanco@courant.com