



DANE COUNTY

Joe Parisi
County Executive

September 9, 2020

Tommy Thompson
President, University of Wisconsin System

Rebecca Blank
Chancellor, University of Wisconsin Madison

Dear President Thompson and Chancellor Blank:

I am writing to express my deep concern with the recent increase in cases of Covid-19 on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. In short order we have all reached a critical juncture in our community's work to fight the spread of illness. UW-Madison's nearly 1,000 cases are resulting in record numbers for our county. New daily infections are the highest they've been since the start of this pandemic. New cases in the past few days are running at least five times what they were in late August. Since September 1st, at least 74% of Dane County's new Covid positive cases were from the UW. These cases stemming from campus increase the probability of community spread and greater demands on our health care system in advance of flu season. According to initial contact tracing from Public Health Madison/Dane County, as of today there are at least 46 separate outbreaks affiliated with the UW-Madison.

The rapid increase in positive cases over the past week comes after Dane County had dramatically lowered caseloads through aggressive public health orders aimed at pushing down numbers and rates of infection. We are an interconnected community. The University is an integral piece of our identity as students and staff live, work, and recreate here. Given that, the UW's experience with Covid-19 stands to have a profound effect on the health of the greater Dane County community.

Given that, I'm respectfully asking the University of Wisconsin-Madison consider the following actions in short order:


1. Require undergraduates living in residence halls to move back home for the rest of this semester. Undergrads could return to their respective communities and quarantine there for 14 days to minimize new spread in their hometowns. The University could offer online learning for these students to participate in from their private homes. Given the nature of how Covid-19 spreads in group settings, reducing numbers in residence halls will help lower the risk of additional spread. If the UW decides against this, I respectfully encourage you to increase university staffing to support student compliance with local public health and UW directives on and off campus.

2. Establish more on-campus quarantine facilities. As positive cases continue, sending people with Covid-19 back into group living situations off campus only perpetuates the spread of illness. You need to support additional quarantine centers especially for students living in off-campus housing.
3. Please triple the number of UW Madison contact tracers within the next 30 days. While I appreciate the commitment and promise of UW Madison to support contact tracing for UW Madison students, the recent surge of positive cases already far overwhelmed capacity the UW had put in place to follow up on cases. Timely and effective contact tracing is critical for isolation. Dane County will soon have over 100 contact tracers to support what we anticipate could be a challenging fall season for Covid. Public Health has continued to add staff as this pandemic has evolved. It's clear the University needs to increase its capacity to support contact tracing for students as soon as practically possible.
4. Increase testing capacity on the UW campus. For example, on 9/8 a quarter of AEC tests were from students – the vast majority from UW. Most reported that they couldn't get an appointment for a test at UW because University Health Services was "booked up." If this pattern is sustained, this equates to at least \$300,000 in daily test kit costs alone. The UW needs to bolster its ability to conduct tests immediately.

The University made the decision to proceed with holding classes this fall despite recommendations from local and national experts urging virtual only classes this semester. We all love our great University and what it brings to our community. Unfortunately, given the pandemic, congregating these students has significantly impacted the capacity of the public health system, local public health efforts, and may impact the health of our community.

I know everything the University worked on this summer to attempt at a return to "normal" was the result of careful thought and planning. We all want to get back to our lives as they were prior to this pandemic. Unfortunately as we have seen across this country and other parts of the globe, this virus willfully spreads whenever the opportunity presents. We are concerned the well-intentioned goal of having UW open and operating as close to normally as possible will result in opportunity for Covid-19 to spread in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Parisi". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Joe Parisi
Dane County Executive