

Classes resume at University of Iowa amid COVID-19 outbreak

Brian Brown
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In the five days since in-person fall classes resumed, 607 University of Iowa students in Iowa City have tested positive for COVID-19. The outbreak at the university, which enrolls more than 30,000 students and has 30,000 employees, mirrors similar situations at universities across the United States, including the University of Alabama and the University of North Carolina.

University of Iowa students who contract the virus can either choose to quarantine at home or in isolated rooms on campus. Over 50 students, according to the university, are currently isolating in on-campus housing.

Blaming students for the outbreak, the university has threatened to sanction those who fail to maintain “safe practices off campus.” The school is relying on students to report each other for violations in an effort to deal with the increased number of positive cases. The rapid increase in cases has little to do with students’ behavior off campus and instead is the results of the bipartisan drive to reopen the economy as the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage.

A professor at the University of Iowa spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the inadequate classroom protections provided by the administration. The school only moved the professor’s class to online learning after they applied for a health waiver. This decision may have prevented a further spread as one of their students has already contracted COVID-19. “If my class had been in person, which is what the university wanted, this would have exposed over 20 students to the virus,” the professor noted.

Despite the risks involved for students and staff alike, the administration has asked teachers not to tell students if one of their peers is sick with coronavirus. The professor continued, “Now we are seeing photos of desks close together. The university is sending out emails claiming it’s the students’ responsibility to maintain social distance and the university has no ability to enforce the

CDC’s guidelines beyond individual choice.”

Grade schools and high schools also opened this month for in-person instruction in Iowa, with the state government implementing a 15 percent positive test rate among the student body before schools would be shut down. The University of Iowa has no such threshold. Johnson County, in which Iowa City is located, has been above a 15 percent positive test rate for the past 5 days, exceeding 33 percent on Friday. The website CovidActNow.Org reported Friday that Iowa now has highest number of daily new cases per capita in the US.

Darrell, a truck driver whose son attends high school in Iowa City, told the WSWWS, “this whole thing is messed up; the governor clearly does not have the people’s best interest in mind. Why else would she insist it’s okay to restart in-person learning in the midst of everything going right now? Our numbers have skyrocketed, and they think the numbers will not go even higher once they reopen schools?”

“They do not care how many people get sick and die; they only care about making sure we keep making them money. They don’t even try to hide it; their policies show. We are not valuable to them. We are treated like cash cows. I am not sending my son to be herded in an unsafe environment; he cannot learn if he is dead.”

As of August 26, 2020, according to the Iowa State Department of Public Health, there have been 58,019 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,062 residents have died from the virus. Both figures are widely believed to be an undercount. Out of the total cases, 4,015 cases are children (ages 0–17), 27,703 adult cases ages (41–60), 16,658 older adult cases ages (61–80), and 7,366 elderly cases ages (81+).

While children represent the smallest share of positive cases, the fact that there are thousands of cases is further evidence that disproves the unscientific theory that children are immune from the virus. On August 24, Iowa

reported its first death of a child due to COVID-19. The death of the five-year-old was reported months after the child's passing.

Even as COVID-19 cases surge, the residents of Johnson County are also dealing with the overwhelming aftermath of a derecho. Three weeks ago, winds of up to 60 miles per hour ripped through the county. The storm caused devastating damage. As of August 20, more than 19,000 people have been left without power.

The lack of advanced warning caused food and other essential supplies to run short, leaving many people without the basics. Iowa City has a poverty rate of 28 percent and a median income of \$21,515; very few residents have enough resources to cover the latest shock that has set so many residents back.

The derecho will cost the county \$6.1 million for cleanup and repairs, including damage to buildings and roofs; fallen trees blocked several roads. While assessments and repairs continue, many families have had to stay in homeless shelters and, as school starts, many families have been left without access to the internet.

According to reports, students and workers in Iowa City have had to gather in the few places with internet connections to prepare for the semester, which could be a factor in a sudden increase in cases.

The evidence is clear: COVID-19 is a deadly virus which spreads quickly wherever large number of people gather and does not care about its victim's age, gender, or racial background; all are susceptible to catching the virus and possibly dying. The government of Republican Governor Kim Reynolds has done nothing to stem the flood of positive COVID-19 cases; in fact, the push to reopen schools is ensuring that infection rates and deaths will increase throughout the state.



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