

Recent Case Trends & Message for University Students  
Health Director Update - 8/14/2020

Good afternoon, Durham, I'm Rod Jenkins, Director of the Durham County Department of Public Health. If you've been paying attention to the governor's Coronavirus task force updates, you've heard a bit of good news. The rate of increase in new COVID-19 cases in North Carolina has slowed slightly. This is also true in Durham County. Also this week, many of our college and university students began their fall semester courses, while other students begin next week. Today I have an important message for our college students and will address these topics.

First, the good news is that the steps we are taking as a community to slow the spread of COVID-19 are working. By staying at home as much as possible, practicing social distancing, and wearing face coverings as required when away from home, we are seeing progress in beating this pandemic in our community. So some of you have begun to wonder why we have to continue taking these steps if we are beginning to see rates slowing down. The answer is simple: this pandemic is not over. We are beginning to see progress *because* of these safety measures, and by removing these measures, we will see cases increase significantly.

As students have returned to campus, we must remain careful as we monitor if or how this return to university life will affect the spread of COVID-19 in the community. To our university students, our wish is for you all to have a safe and enjoyable semester. It is critical that you treat this semester the way it should be treated: like an unprecedented experience in the midst of a pandemic. It cannot be treated as businesses as usual. The average age of individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 in Durham continues to get younger, so remember that although you may not be at the highest risk for *severe* illness from COVID-19, you are still at risk. Additionally, any consequences you may face in your own life can affect the health and safety of your friends, roommates, professors, staff in residences and dining halls, and more. Before you attend the next party or leave your residence without a mask, remember that others could have COVID-19 and pass it to you even if they don't know it yet. Consider how your friends and others would be at risk if you were to become ill. Make the smart choices that not only protect your own lifelong health, but also prove that you care about the lives of your campus community.

We are making progress Durham, but we still have a long way to go. It is still far from safe to return to your group gatherings, leave your masks off, or pretend this pandemic is over. If we let our guard down now or give in to COVID fatigue by forgetting safety measures, we will only see cases increase quickly, with more lives lost unnecessarily. We will continue to make greater and faster progress if you continue to wear your face covering, practice social distancing, and remind others to do the same. We can do this, Durham.