



## College Brief

NO. 07            September 24, 2020

FROM:            Louis J. Petrizzo, Interim President

SUBJECT:        SUNY Suffolk to Commence Mandatory COVID-19 Testing for On-campus Students and Voluntary Testing for Faculty and Staff

### **SUNY Announces Mandatory COVID-19 Testing for On-Campus Students**

### **SUNY Suffolk to Begin Pooled Saliva Testing the Week of September 28**

### **Faculty and Staff Invited to be Tested on a Voluntary Basis**

When college campuses across the country reopened for the fall semester, many experienced outbreaks of new COVID-19 infections. In response, State University of New York Chancellor Jim Malatras announced that all 64 of SUNY's colleges and universities would implement a mandatory student testing program to detect COVID-19 cases. This new requirement ensures that all on-campus SUNY students will be tested regularly during the semester, which will assist public health officials and every SUNY campus in identifying, tracing, and containing the virus. It will also help to ensure the health of our community.

SUNY Suffolk will participate in COVID-19 pooled saliva testing, beginning the week of September 28<sup>th</sup> and continuing through early December. The College has determined that it will invite faculty and staff to participate in this testing on a voluntary basis. Student testing will be mandatory.

The College's testing plan has been reviewed and approved by SUNY. The plan requires all on-campus SUNY Suffolk students to be tested up to three times during the semester. Each campus will arrange to test all students who are taking classes on campus, as well as all athletic team members attending on-campus practices.

Faculty and staff are invited to participate in the pooled saliva testing on a voluntary basis.

SUNY's pooled saliva testing approach enables us to collect individual cheek swab samples from small groups of between 10-25 people, and to perform a screening analysis of the group with just one test. The 10-25 individual samples are combined into one batch, which is sent to SUNY Upstate Medical where it is tested for SARS-CoV-2 virus.

### **Important Steps before Testing**

- Two days before being tested, all test participants, whether mandatory (students) or voluntary (faculty and staff), will need to register at the SUNY website that has been established for this purpose. As part of the registration, each registrant will establish a private password, provide demographic information, contact information, and health insurance information. It is necessary to gather health insurance information so that if a test group pool comes back as COVID-19 positive, SUNY Upstate Medical will be able to proceed with testing the individual saliva swabs that were collected, enabling those in the cohort to receive individual results within a few days.

### **Important Steps the Day of Testing**

- Do not eat or drink anything, including chewing gum, mints or lozenges, within 30 minutes of reporting to the saliva testing collection site.
- Abstain from smoking, vaping, or using smokeless tobacco products for 30 minutes prior to the test.
- Do not brush your teeth or use mouthwash within three hours of reporting to the saliva testing collection site.

### **The Testing Process**

The testing process will work as follows:

1. Employees who wish to volunteer to be tested, should contact David Schneider, Director of Risk Mitigation, via email at [schneida@sunysuffolk.edu](mailto:schneida@sunysuffolk.edu) or via phone at ext. 4619. Mr. Schneider will take these requests for testing and coordinate scheduling with the Campus Executive Deans. Faculty and staff who indicate they would like to voluntarily participate, will be tested based on availability in the campus testing schedule.
2. Students will be notified to attend a specific saliva testing session on campus. Students will hear from the Campus Executive Dean regarding their specific testing schedule.
3. Every participant will need to pre-register for testing at the following SUNY link: <http://register.suny-covid.com> two days before the scheduled test appointment that they receive. Step 1 of the registration form must be completed before arriving for the test. The remaining portion of the registration will be completed at the test location, including registering the specific test kit.
4. Every participant can only be tested in one pooled group.
5. Saliva testing collection sites will take place at the following campus locations:

- Ammerman – Babylon Student Center
  - Michael J. Grant – Cafeteria in Captree Commons
  - Eastern – Peconic Building or (on select days, once per month) in the Multipurpose Room in the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Center
6. Campus Executive Deans are working on arranging campus testing schedules to take place between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays on the Eastern Campus, and between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Mondays-Wednesdays on the Ammerman and Michael J. Grant campuses. Efforts are being made to add an evening test option once per month as part of this schedule.
  7. Individuals administer the test to themselves, swabbing their cheeks for 10 or 15 seconds, and providing the saliva samples to a healthcare representative at the testing collection site.
  8. On each of our three campuses, the pooled testing operations will be coordinated by the college-wide Associate Dean of the School of Nursing and managed by healthcare representatives, thereby ensuring that procedures and protocols are properly followed, staff is properly trained, and privacy and confidentiality are maintained.
  9. The 10-25 individual samples will be combined into one batch that will be sent to SUNY Upstate Medical where it is tested for SARS-CoV-2 virus.
  10. A negative test means that all 10-25 people in the sample group are presumed at the time to be coronavirus-free.
  11. A positive test for the pool would mean each individual saliva sample within the pool will be further tested to pinpoint exact positive case(s) from the pool.

### **Testing Q & A**

QUESTION #1      Why is SUNY testing us for COVID-19?

- A. State University of New York Chancellor Jim Malatras has determined there is a necessity for SUNY to work toward full COVID-19 safety compliance by testing for the COVID-19 virus. The Chancellor has advised the 64 colleges and universities within the SUNY system of the need for testing and strict enforcement of safety measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

QUESTION #2      How does mandatory testing help?

- A. Mandatory student testing is one component of Chancellor Malatras' three-pronged approach to keeping SUNY campuses safe and open. The Chancellor's strategy includes: strict enforcement of safety protocols to minimize cases (e.g. wearing a face covering/mask at all times while on campus; practicing proper hand hygiene; physical distancing; routine health screening and symptom monitoring), and collection of case-count statistics to support data-based decisions that will help contain the spread of the virus when it does appear. These efforts help confirm that our safety protocols are working effectively.

QUESTION #3 Why is SUNY using group saliva (pooling) testing?

- A. Pooling is utilized in areas where the number of positive tests is expected to be low. This testing is less expensive and less invasive. This test will allow us to provide sensitive, accurate, and rapid feedback about the presence of COVID-19 in saliva samples from the limited number of students attending classes on our campuses this fall. We invite faculty and staff, working on campus this semester, to voluntarily participate in this testing as well.

QUESTION #4 What happens if the test results come back “negative?”

- A. A negative test for the pool means that all 10-25 people in the pool sample are presumed at the time to be coronavirus-free. Participants who test “negative” will not be contacted further.

QUESTION #5 What happens if the test results come back “positive?”

- A. When a pool test comes back positive, members of the pool sample group will be contacted regarding follow-up and next steps. The same saliva sample submitted for the pool will now be immediately tested individually. This greatly improves testing capacity and result turnaround time, which is crucial to tracking and isolating the virus. Upon receipt of a positive result, individuals in the pool will be notified to either isolate for up to 14 days or until otherwise notified by the College or the Department of Health. Follow-up testing will include individual PCR testing or reflex testing. Upon guidance from the Suffolk County Department of Health, the College will refer those who test positive, for appropriate follow-up care and next steps. If a class section was pooled as one testing cohort—the entire class may be asked to switch to remote learning temporarily. Alternatively, individuals may be asked to work with professors remotely during a period of isolation.

QUESTION #6 Will faculty and staff be charged for the saliva test or any follow-up testing that will be necessary after a positive result?

- A. Faculty and staff will not be charged for the saliva pool test. Subsequent follow-up testing (individual PCR testing or reflex testing) will be processed through the employee’s health insurance and may be subject to copay.

QUESTION #7 What happens if a student refuses to be tested?

- A. Student Affairs staff will lead conversations with these students. As this is a SUNY mandate, testing becomes a requirement for students taking classes on-campus and practicing athletic teams. The Protect SUNY Agreement that is included as part of the health screening questionnaire that is completed by every student coming onto campus, has been modified to include this testing mandate as a student expectation. Failure to attend scheduled testing appointments or otherwise failing to comply with the College’s health protocols (including testing and screening) may result in the student being denied access to campus.

Please note that as the pandemic continues to evolve, the content in this communication remains subject to change as new information, guidance and/or direction is received.