

WSU COVID-19 Town Hall – November 18

>> Good morning everyone.

Welcome to the 13th in our series of system-wide WSU

COVID-19 town hall meetings.

Glad you're all able to join us.

My name is Phil Weiler,

I'm Vice President for Marketing and Communications,

and once again, I'm going to be serving as the moderator for our session this morning.

It's worth noting that this is actually the first of what will be

two different COVID-19 town halls today.

This session is geared toward students and employees,

as well as members of the general public.

We have another town hall scheduled for tonight at 5:00 PM,

that will be specifically aimed at students and their family members, and caregivers.

So I'll talk a little bit more about that in a moment,

but let's talk about what we'll be discussing this morning.

Our town hall this morning is going to cover a variety of topics.

We're going to start off with a discussion about what

our plans for the spring semester classes will look like.

We'll talk in some detail about our COVID-19

testing plan for COVID-19 in the spring semester.

Talk a little bit about plans for housing on the Pullman campus.

We'll get a quick update on student services and activities fees,

is been an area or a topic of interest ever since we

made the decision to go from face-to-face to virtual back in March.

So have some information to report based on action by our Board of Regents just last week. We'll touch briefly on some research the WSU faculty members are doing, that specifically looks at COVID-19 and what we might be able to do to help combat the pandemic, and then finally, we'll close with an update on what infection rates look like, here on the Pullman campus.

As most people are aware, we did see an outbreak early in August at the start of the semester, and so it's worth us getting update on where things stand today.

Again, as I mentioned, we have a second town hall scheduled for tonight at 5:00 PM.

Again, it's going to be aimed at students and their families, and it's going to go into greater depth into what the spring semester will look like.

So if that's something that you're interested in, you can go to experience.wsu.edu to be able to access that session as well, and that's scheduled to run in an hour.

Our panelist today, let me introduce them briefly.

We're joined by Kirk Schulz,

President of Washington State University.

Elizabeth Chilton, she's our provost and the Executive Vice President,

Colleen Kerr, Vice President for External Affairs and Government Relations,

Mary Jo Gonzalez, Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Jessica Bell,

she's a clinical instructor in our College of Veterinary Medicine,

Dr. Raelynn Farnsworth is

a Clinical Associate Professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Anthony Nicola who is an Engle Distinguished Professor of Infectious Diseases,

again in the College of Veterinary Medicine and then finally

Jason Sampson, and Jason is the Assistant Director of Environmental Services,
Public Health, and Sustainability.

So with the introductions out of the way,
let me turn it over to President Schulz,
so he can kick us off.

>> Well, hello Cougs and welcome to lucky number 13 today.

Thanks for joining us and I hope you find this useful as always,
and we have a bunch of questions that were submitted in advance that all of us have
seen and we'll certainly try and get to as many of those as we possibly can.

Just a couple of things as we get started though.

I don't know about you all,

but I'm certainly reached the point in the semester where kind of weariness takes over.

I find myself by five o'clock,

just exhausted all the Zoom calls,

the interactions that we do in this particular way,

and during a regular semester,

during Thanksgiving time, is a time when many of us get

a little bit of a chance to recover a little bit,

work a couple of days, have some time with family,

and then with the end of the semester coming up just in a few short weeks,

we'll have some time hopefully,

for everybody to get refresh.

But to our faculty,

staff, and students out there,

I hope, I just want to remind you, occasionally,
shut the laptop, take the evening,
go watch Netflix, read a favorite book,
go for a walk, do whatever you need to.
But make sure that you're taking care of
yourselves and you're giving yourselves this time,
to recover from this kind of constant looking at a video screen. [NOISE]

As the holidays come up though, please,
we are going to ask all of you to take precautions to protect those around you,
your loved ones, family members, friends, colleagues.

Three simple things and we'll remind you these again and again.

First, wear a mask, second,
wash your hands, third, watch your distance.

These are not any different that we've been communicating all along,
but we want to remind everybody that it's really important.

This applies to our entire university community, not just our students,
but our faculty and staff as well,

and we've seen some recent spikes in COVID cases in our community,

and a lot of that has been attributed to
social events and after work activities and things like this,

and not just in the 18-25 year-old age group.

We're seeing this in a lot of our faculty and staff.

So just a reminder with the holidays,

please continue to be careful.

We also encourage all of you to limit your travel this holiday season if at all possible,
and students will repeat this multiple times.

If you are traveling home,

please get tested for the virus before you'd go.

Once you leave campus for Thanksgiving break,

we're asking you not to return until the spring semester starts in January.

This is going to be really important.

Yesterday, I'm so proud of our folks here at WSU,

who did 500 COVID tests,

the most I think we've ever done in a single day.

I know many of you are doing this,

but it's going to be really important moving ahead.

A reminder to all of our employees,

please continue to work remotely whenever possible.

If you do have to come into work,

remember do a test every day,

but we want to make sure that that's clear

as we want people to continue to work remotely from home,

or from those out of office spaces as much as possible.

If you test positive for COVID-19,

please remember to provide

the contact tracers with a complete list of your contacts and where you've been.

This is really important because this allows us to go and

understand the spread of

the virus through the community or co-workers or things like this,

and being as upfront as possible is really important.

We're not trying to do a judgment call,

we're trying to get good information,
and I know Jason and others may talk about this a little bit more.
I get tested once a week, every Monday.
I just made a commitment to go in and get tested,
and then just to really make sure that I
limit the folks that I interact with on a personal basis.
Finally, I love the holiday season.
I love being around family members and
things and sort of celebrating the year as it will.
But we're going to remind everybody on campus,
those holiday celebrations need to be done virtually.
We don't want to have any type of event,
or faculty, staff or students on campus,
so while it's going to seem a little strange,
make sure you'd get creative.
Use Zoom and other types of things,
but we're going remind everybody,
no in-person holiday gatherings on campus for any particular purpose.
Avoiding those group gatherings is
a key step really in slowing the virus in our community.
Finally, I am super proud of all the folks that you're going to hear from today.
On this particular video call,
we got some exceptional faculty doing great work around COVID-19.
We've got staff members and other vice presidents and other key individuals.
They've been working all semester at not controlling the virus,
because nobody is going to control it,

but certainly making sure that we're keeping our community safe,
we're keeping faculty, staff,
and students as safe as possible,
and that we're learning from our mistakes or things that we could have done better.

I think as you hear about our spring testing plan,
we want to take the things we learned in the fall
and we want to apply those to the spring term.

So I'm proud of the job that all of you are doing.

I'm proud of our faculty, staff, and students.

I am proud of your resilience.

Keep at it, and as always,

thank you for the opportunity to serve as your president and go Cougs.

>> Great. Thank you Kirk. You made the comment that,

if students do choose to travel home for Thanksgiving,

that they need to make sure they stay home until the start of the semester.

It's probably worth reminding

students that that means you're going to be gone for two months.

You need to make sure you've packed the winter clothes you need,

you need to make sure that you have all your textbooks,

that you have your phone charger.

You need to make sure you clean out your refrigerator because you're

not going to be opening that door for another two months.

As a student who didn't think about that one when I

was in college and coming back and opening that refrigerator door,

it becomes a very nasty science experiment.

Do make sure that the fridge is properly cleaned before you leave for a couple months.

With that, let me turn it over to Provost Chilton Elizabeth.

I know we talked a little bit in our last session about what spring semester looks like, but we still get questions.

In fact, even some of the questions just this week that came in, it's clear that we need to continue to talk about with folks what the plans look like for spring.

Can you share a little bit about that?

>> Yeah. Sure. If you don't mind,

I will just tack on to what you were just saying about travel for Thanksgiving.

Just to say that most of our classes this semester are remote on all of our physical campuses across the system.

But even those we have about 30 classes on the Pullman campus, for example, that do have some face-to-face component.

But after thanksgiving, we have asked even those with physical components of the class that we've asked faculty to be accommodating for students who stay home, there might be a few exceptions.

Some of our clinical, or health science related, or internships, or what have you.

But please check with your professor.

We've asked them all to be flexible and allow students to remain home after thanksgiving if they choose to travel.

But for spring, we've learned from this fall that a lot of what we're doing to keep our students and our staff and our faculty safe, that it's working.

Those face-to-face instructional activities were requiring PPE.

They're maintaining social distancing,

they're doing training, and we've seen that that really works.

We expanded that model for the spring.

We still are going to be offering instruction primarily, remotely,

but we've expanded the number of in-person activities or classes to about 65 or so.

These include things like art studios,

working with animals, and our agricultural sciences.

Engineering, if they're using

really specific equipment that would just be impossible to replicate,

we made those exceptions.

For each campus, the exceptions for Pullman came through my office,

but each of the other physical campuses made their own exception process,

to make sure we were maintaining the highest educational quality,

but also keeping people safe. [NOISE]

You know also Phil, that we decided not to have a week long spring break,

for spring, but instead we will take five days.

That will really be no class,

no assignments, no Zoom.

We have to come up with a catchy phrase.

They're just like, no Zoom days,

or something where students and faculty quite honestly can just

take a break for few days and our faculty can be doing other things.

But our students can really just take

a true break at periodic times throughout the semester.

That's what we're looking at.

We're also going to be starting about eight days later than we normally would.

In part to give everyone a nice long break and to allow for potential staggered move in.

I know vice [inaudible] will talk about that a little bit.

>> Like now if we could turn to Colleen Kerr,

and have Colleen talk about the COVID-19 testing plan that we had been working on.

Colleen, I know that there's been a large number of people

who have been working for quite a long time to put together this plan.

I think we've talked about this in previous town halls.

We did have a different type of plan in place that we were developing over the summer,

when we thought that classes in the fall would be face-to-face.

When we made that decision to not have face-to-face classes,

that surveillance testing plan was no longer relevant,

but we do have a different approach we're looking for in the spring.

I'd love to have you talk about that.

My understanding is there're four major components to that plan.

Could you walk us through those?

>> Yeah, sure. Thanks Phil.

Let me first thank you,

and Mary Jo and Jason who have all been working

really closely with Daryll and me, and Dr. DeWald on testing,

attestation, and contact tracing.

Our goal for spring semester will be to test every student who comes to Whitman County.

That is without question our goal.

As we work toward that,

we have put together a testing plan that has four components.

Let me talk about those just for a moment here.

The first is arrival testing and this is a really important component of this.

Students, as you are coming back to Whitman County,
we are going to be offering,
and inviting, and asking some of you to participate in arrival testing.

There are a variety of categories of students who will be participating in this.

The first category is any student who's living at WSU.

If you were living in a hall of residence or you're living in an apartment,
we are going to have a program set up for you to participate in arrival testing.

We are also going to be asking our student employees,
those students who're participating in either Pac-12 athletic programs,
intramural sports, or sports clubs to participate.

If you're going to be using a WSU facility like the rec center,
the Chinook, we're going to ask you to participate as well.

We will be clearly stating that.

We'll be working with,
maybe Army National Guard again,
or with other partners to insight to offer a robust arrival testing programs.

Before you actually move into your location or before you interface with WSU facilities,
that you will be participating in arrival testing.

If you don't fall into that category.

We will also have testing for you.

We would invite any of you who are coming into Whitman County to
participate in arrival testing on a voluntary basis,
and we will have that setup in January well in advance of class is starting.

In addition, we will have other components of a testing plan.

The other one is diagnostic testing.

Cougar Health Services is going to be focused this semester exclusively on diagnostic testing.

That means if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 per the CDC, or the State Department of Health, or if you've been a close contact, which is happening because of the disease spread in Washington state, then Cougar Health Services is appropriate for you.

Really students can avail themselves of a number of different options, but diagnostic testing will be a significant component.

For that one, you'll want to bring your insurance card if you have one, and if you don't, that does not matter.

Testing is available to you.

The other two components are, voluntary screen testing and then targeted screening testing.

Voluntary screening testing is going to be exactly what we're doing in fall semester right now, and many of us are aware of that.

For students, for faculty, for staff, if you hold a Cougar card, we will have voluntary screening testing.

That is, you don't feel like you need to go see your health provider, we're going to have testing available for you exactly what Kirk is participating in.

He goes once a week. We will have the opportunity available to you.

We have an extraordinary team of scientists.

We have some faculty here today.

We have an extraordinary team of scientists led by

Dr. Guy Palmer, who was a Senior Director for Global Health.

He is the founder of the Allen School for Global Health.

He has been working with a group of modelers.

Once you participate in voluntary screening testing,
we may very well ask you to continue to participate.

You would receive communications from us asking you to
participate anywhere between two and four and maybe more times a semester,
so that we can really have a good understanding
of what the disease looks like in Whitman County.

In addition, we're going to be doing targeted screening testing.

There's a couple of different categories for this.

But the big one is wastewater sampling.

Wastewater sampling is that any facility that WSU has domain over so that's WSU building,
Jason and his team have been

working with a number of folks to actually sample the wastewater.

If we see the wastewater sample turn from negative to positive,

then we will be asking the people associated with
that building to participate in screening testing.

It is a really important way for us to be able to
quickly identify those individuals who may have COVID 19,
and then to isolate them from the rest of the community.

Then the second component of targeted screening testing,
would be for those students and faculty who are participating in certain programs.

Athletics is one that we are familiar with.

We would also identify,

for example, some student employees,

and also some students and faculty participating in certain research programs.

The Office of Research has been a leader in addressing safety protocols during COVID-19.

In the process of looking at some of the labs that we have and the working environments,

it is their opinion that based on inability to maintain

physical distancing and the type of research that's

happening that for students and faculty participating,

the Office of Research will require a targeted screening testing program.

Similar to the voluntary screening testing program,

the frequency of the testing would be determined

by our faculty and led by Dr. Guy Palmer.

>> Thanks Colleen, couple of things come to mind for me based on what you just said to me.

One is, just so I got it clear in my head,

The four components are: we're going to be doing arrival testing on the Pullman Campus,

we will do diagnostic testing for anyone who has any kind of a symptom,

we'll do voluntary testing,

and then there'll also be, as you mentioned,

that targeted testing where we would use

things like testing of effluent wastewater to be able to

see if there is a presence of the virus in

there and then we can test those particular buildings.

>> Yeah.

>> Can you talk a little bit about, first of all,

why is this testing in Pullman,

and are there testing opportunities at other campuses as well?

>> Yes, that is a great question. Thank you.

I failed to say that our testing plan right now,
that we have had approved by the Board of Regions and that we are working to
operationalize is actually for the Pullman Campus and the Spokane Campus.

We will have arrival testing for our Spokane students and for faculty,
and we will also have ongoing voluntary screening for our Spokane Campus.

The reason that we have moved forward with those two campuses first,
is because of the nature of the campuses.

In Spokane, for example,
because we have a clinical student population,
because they're in a clinical environment,
have the potential for higher risk of disease spread.

Similarly, for our faculty,
it's critically important we provide this for our faculty and students.

Whitman County, we are truly unique,
correct usage of the word,
in the State of Washington.

We have a large residential student population,
little smaller during COVID granted,
but is still a large residential student population
in a county that has limited access to health care.

If we think about the reasons that we
decided to move forward with pursuing a medical school,
that is exactly for reasons like this.

There are many counties in the state of
Washington that have limited access to health care,

Whitman County is one of those counties.

Because of the nature of that,

it is really important that we move forward with the testing plan.

For our other campuses.

The majority of the counties in the state of Washington do offer screening testing.

Because we don't have formal residential facilities on those campuses or in Clark County,

I know we have affiliated housing in Tri-Cities,

we're not moving forward at this time with screening testing.

Having said that, I really want to acknowledge

Chancellor Haynes and our Tri-Cities Campus for moving forward in

terms of partnering with Benton and Franklin counties to

offer screening testing on our campus for our faculty there.

Those are options that we will continue to work toward and to

explore with local public health all around the state for all of our WSU locations.

>> My understanding is that there will be testing available on WSU Everett Campus,

that we will be partnering with healthcare providers there

and we will provide the location for that testing to take place.

>> Yeah. One thing I want to remind all of us,

and we can provide a link,

the Department of Health has information for local public health in every county,

is that, again, in the majority of the counties in the state of Washington,

local public health has partnered with

healthcare providers and with the state of Washington,

sometimes through FEMA to offer screening testing and we can participate in that.

Again, that is the model that the Tri-Cities and Everett,

that's the model that they are working toward.

>> I think that is an important point to make that part of the reason that we are focusing here in Whitman County where the Pullman Campus is located is because currently Whitman County does not have a screening testing option available for the members of that community. I'm going to ask the folks who are monitoring our chat here in YouTube to please pull the link for our testing plan and put it in the chat function. As we have done in all of our other town halls, we do have subject matter experts who are monitoring that chat in YouTube and try to answer questions people have. I think the chat might be a good place if somebody wants to learn more and get a little bit more detail about what that spring testing plan looks like. It is available on our COVID-19 website, and so good for folks to be able to look at that when they have a moment. Colleen, thank you. I appreciate all the work that you've done around this. It has been a large effort involving a lot of senior faculty who are really experts in this area of infectious disease and disease modeling. Thank you for helping bring this to fruition. I'm looking forward to being able to get this plan kick off and hopefully really have a significant impact on suppressing the virus moving forward. Thank you. Mary Jo, I'd like to have you spend a few minutes, if you could, on two different topics. As I mentioned, we are looking at making a change for spring semester around housing.

We might have a few more students on campus,
have you talk about that, and then also talk about,
if you could, the services and activities fee.

As I mentioned, that was something that's been
of concern for students for quite a long time.

Talk a little bit, if you could also,
about how those services and activities fees are set.

Who makes the decision for how that money is spent?

I think it's a great opportunity for people to learn a little bit more about those fees.

>> Absolutely Phil. I'm really excited to join all of you. It's been a while.

But I also know that you've had some amazing people here on the town halls.

I'm glad to join you today.

I do want to remind you all that we are having
a dedicated town hall for students and their loved ones this evening at five o'clock.

I'm going to give a very surface view of these two topics,
but we will go much more in depth this evening.

I actually have some really amazing colleagues who will be joining us to talk about this.

Please join us on that call.

Before I answer the questions,

I do want to say something.

To all of my Cougs out there,

I know you're tired of the rona.

I know that I've heard from many of you that it's really hard right now,
some of you are full on in Zoom and COVID fatigue,
and I know you're on your last nerve.

You've told me how lonely you are,

that you're hurting and that you're scared,
and you're really disappointed that
your plans for break wouldn't be what they wanted to be.

I think it's really important for you to
know that you are not alone and that we're here for you.

I'm asking out, ask that you reach out and get help,
that you don't try to do this on your own,
that you call a friend.

Don't Zoom, call a friend,
don't text, call and talk to a loved one.

Call us, talk about what's happening and what is
working and what is not working for you, because we're here.

If you're doing well, if you're one of those Cougs who's like,
"I'm so excited about what's happening,
this semester has gone well."

Please reach out to your friends.

Please connect with one another because right now more than anything,
we need to be supporting each other and taking care of each other.

I think it's also important that in our Cougar country,
in our Cougar family that you're going to be hearing from some faculty who are
doing some really amazing things around COVID-19.

People often say, "Mary Jo, how is that connected?"

Well, I will tell you that they are all fighting for
Washington State and fighting for you as Cougs as well.

The research that they're doing is making a tremendous difference.

Frankly, that research is allowing us to bring more students back to campus.

We're going to all win the day for crimson and gray by
serving in the roles that we have to serve in.

Please remember that we're supporting each other and by supporting each other,
we're able to do and overcome and frankly cancel COVID,
like we're all hoping to do.

Part of what we've heard about
the mental health issues and the issues that our students are
facing around academic performance is that they really want to be on campus.

We wouldn't be able to do this without Colleen
and Daryll, and so many others fighting,
as well as our faculty members who are modeling
what the COVID transmission rates would be on our Pullman Campus.

We are excited to welcome back our first year students.

We do have rooms available,
they will be single occupancy,
there will not be double occupancy.

All of the data tells us that this is the best strategy for our students.

We're really excited to welcome them back.

All first year students received an email from us to go and sign up for housing.

That will be open all the way up until the first day of classes.

If you find right now you're not ready to make a decision about that,
or if you know someone who still wants to think about that,
it will be available through the first day of classes.

Please go to housing.wsu.edu, and again,
that's housing.wsu.edu for all of your questions and answers.

I will also want to remind you to get tested,
because getting tested allows us to find out what's happening in our Cougar community.

Phil, about the student fees,

I have the pleasure of working with students,
about 11 different advisory groups,
who coordinate the student fee process for us.

What often happens with student fees is the students decide for themselves that they want
to do a referendum and get approval for that particular fee.

That's everything from the Evergreen fee that we currently support,

it's five dollars, it helps the Daily Evergreen get published,

it helps those aspiring journalists to do some really amazing work on stories,

it allows students to again invest in their university experience.

Students asked us early in the fall to reconsider that.

The president and I, as well as our senior leadership team thought that

the most important piece of that would be to frankly include students in the decision.

All of our boards on the Pullman Campus met,

the Student Health Advisory Committee, the Chinook Committee,

our CUB Advisory, Students Senate was involved,

and they made some decisions that will be about a \$75 return to the Pullman Campus.

Those boards included about 250 students,

frankly, from across the system who participated.

What will happen for students is if the fall fee was

something that the recommended board set and that would be, for example,

the SRC fee and the Chinook fee,

they will post this fall,

and they will post in December,

and they will show up as credits for the spring.

If the boards recommended that it's a spring delay in fee,

and that's something like the Student Health Advisory Committee which

recommended not collecting \$40 of the spring fee,

that will also show up.

Those will show up as credits in the spring,

where students will not have to pay those.

It will help pay for their spring process.

We do have fill a normal process that goes

through the spring that we are working on for all of those fees.

We do have some boards who are still looking at those fees,

but I definitely wanted to give you a very brief update where we're at.

>> Thank you, Mary Jo. I think the point you made is worth repeating.

Students, in essence, vote to tax themselves,

to support programs that they think are of value to them.

I think it makes perfect sense that those student boards get

an opportunity to make a decision about

what fees should need to continue and which one should be waived.

As you mentioned, there were quite a few meetings on the Pullman Campus.

I know there were meetings on Tri-Cities Campus, I believe,

as well because they also have their own services and activities fee.

Thank you for that update. I appreciate that.

I'd like to change gears a little bit now.

As Mary Jo mentioned,

Washington State University is fortunate to have a number

of nationally recognized experts who are doing work on COVID-19.

Specifically how we, as a human population, can get ahead of this particular virus

and make sure that it is not causing us to have to continue to

be locked down and to take steps that none of us wants to take.

I'm going to turn the mic over to Doctors

Jessica Bell and Raelynn Farnsworth here in just a moment.

But it's worth giving a little bit of an introduction to the work that they're doing.

As I mentioned earlier, they are part of the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Our College of Veterinary Medicine has been for many years working

on type of diseases called zoonotic diseases.

These are pathogens that typically will jump from animals to humans and infect people.

College of Vet Med has been really focused on how do we identify

and stop those pathogens from making that trip from animals to humans?

Doctors Bell and Farnsworth were there looking at things a little bit in the inverse.

They are looking at humans,

people who are testing positive for COVID-19 and asking the question,

are people actually transmitting the virus to their pets?

They're doing this work in partnership with University of Washington.

I know that in the chat,

if anyone is interested in participating in this study,

there will be a link there where you can learn more.

But let me stop and let Jessica and Raelynn

tell us a little bit about what this project

is because I think it's actually really interesting.

>> Thanks Phil. Dr. Bell and I are participating as Phil said,

in a joint project with the University of Washington.

That is what we are doing,

we are looking at COVID positive households and we're looking at their pets.

We're trying to see if the owners have transmitted the virus,

the SARS COVID-19 to the pets.

Then we're going to look at maybe what that means as far as transmission.

>> To find this out,

we're testing dogs and cats that reside in COVID-19

positive households for the SARS COVID-19 virus.

Our samples include a small blood sample,

oropharyngeal swabs and a nasal swab and also rectal swab.

We're recruiting any household that has had

COVID-19 positive person and has an indoor/outdoor dog or cat.

In Seattle, our study partners are also looking at hamsters and ferrets.

Each participant needs to complete a 10-15 minute

survey about the household and their animals and how they interact.

We can sample your animal either at our WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital or in your home.

The animals are handling sampling actually very well.

The sampling does not require as invasive swab as in the human side.

>> So far we've actually sampled 51 animals in 31 different households.

Our goal is to have 100 households,

so we have a bit to go.

To date, all the animals that we've tested have had

negative PCR test for SARS COVID-19, the virus.

But the antibody test,

we are currently validating the process.

But they're showing some interesting results which we hope to be able to report soon.

What we haven't had is any positive test.

But if we do get a positive PCR test for the presence of the virus,

what we would do is advise the owner to keep the animals quarantined from other animals.

Since studies have shown that there is some species to

species transmission of the disease.

But there is no study that is indicating any companion animal to human transfer yet.

>> Finally, we did want to do a little plug for our research study

that if you are someone that's COVID positive or know someone that is,

please go to our website and sign up for the study for

your cat or dog and help us with this important research.

We've put that link in the chat for you.

>> Thank you, Jessica.

I have the YouTube chat open and someone is asking if this study is

only open to Washington residents or could residents of Moscow, Idaho participate?

>> We just did one in Moscow yesterday, so absolutely.

Anywhere in this area.

We can go to your home or we have had

a few people bring their pets into the Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

>> Great. Thank you. Again, that link is in the chat for YouTube,

if you'd like to learn more. I appreciate that.

It seems to me that this is particularly important as

we've seen with this question about transmission from animals to humans and vice versa,

as we've seen what has been transpiring in Denmark

with mink there and they're concerned that they may need

to call the entire population of
minks in that country because there's
a fear of whether or not there could be transmission.

Obviously I think that situation is ongoing.

I think it's latest today there have been new developments.

But this idea of zoonotic diseases is really critical and as I
mentioned it is something that

the College of Veterinary Medicine has been focusing on for a number of years.

I think that we're fortunate to have

that level of expertise that can help us look at some of these questions.

Speaking of our colleagues in the College of Veterinary Medicine,

I'd like to turn to Dr. Anthony Nicola.

Anthony has been working for quite a long time looking at how viruses
are actually able to invade a cell and ultimately infect a cell.

Obviously that has great interest with regard to the COVID-19 virus.

If we are able to understand that process,

we may be able to come up with

interventions that would prevent the virus from being able to enter the cell.

Dr. Nicola, looks you've got your slides up,

I'll let you take it away.

>> Great. Thanks Phil.

It's a pleasure to be here.

I'm a Virologist in the Department of Veterinary Microbiology and Pathology.

I've spent my entire career trying to understand how viruses infect cells,
specifically how viruses enter cells,

the very first step in the infectious process.

Moved the research laboratory here to Pullman in 2011 and we've been working on virus entry.

I always like to start by thanking the members of my laboratory.

I'm very fortunate to work with a very talented group of scientists.

These are the good folks that actually do all the work.

What is virus entry and why is it important?

When you think about virus infecting a human or an animal,

if you zoom in and think about it in simple terms,

so you have a virus infecting one cell,

so that very first cell.

If we're talking about the novel coronavirus,

this could be a lung cell, for example.

The virus approaches the cell and through

a very complex, sophisticated series of processes,

the virus succeeds in entering the cell.

This is a multi-step process,

it's very complicated and we're very interested in

the nitty-gritty details of every step here.

But what I'd like to mention is that this provides several opportunities

to interfere with the virus and stop the virus in its tracks.

If we understand how the virus enters the cells,

this can lead to new ways to stop infection.

This includes, interventions such as

antiviral drugs for treatment and vaccines for prevention.

Our laboratory has studied many viruses over the years.

Our specialty has been herpesviruses,
including the human herpes simplex virus,
which causes cold sores and sexually transmitted infections and we're at the vet school,
so we're interested in veterinary herpesviruses that infect cattle and pigs as well.

We've recently turned our attention to coronaviruses, SARS-CoV-2 specifically.

This is a diagram of the virus.

SARS-CoV-2 is the name of the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease.

Of great importance is this spike protein shown here in red.

It's present on the surface of the virus and it is

a key component for how the virus infects,

how the virus enters that very first cell.

This provides a place where we can

intervene and so when you're talking about antiviral drugs and vaccines,

many times it is the spike protein that is interfered.

We have spent a lot of time understanding the spike proteins of many different viruses.

Many viruses have their own version of the spike protein

and so we've learned a lot about the herpes spike proteins.

What we're doing is we are applying our knowledge of the herpes

spike to understand how the SARS-CoV-2 spike works.

This spike has a very interesting feature in that it

changes shape causing entry of the virus.

I have a diagram here, zoomed in.

This is the spike on the surface of the virus.

The virus is approaching a cell here,

and the spike actually undergoes a change in its shape.

It actually reaches out and grabs the target cell and brings it in close so it can enter,

so it can invade the cell.

You can imagine that this is a critical moment in

infection that if we're able to interfere,

this would be a really good thing.

We're interested in, for example,

a drug that might bind to the spike protein and prevent

this change in its shape so that if you prevent this shape change,

you're preventing virus entry into that first cell.

Then you're preventing disease and

infection in the individual and importantly ultimately,

you're preventing spread to another person.

Preventing this shape change is a new idea,

a new antiviral approach to perhaps treat

SARS-CoV-2 and other viral infections such as the herpes viral infections.

What's next for us?

We're currently in the laboratory establishing experimental methods

to understand how this coronavirus spike works.

We're seeking funding for this work.

We have grant applications out to the National Institutes of Health and

the National Science Foundation for our research on SARS-CoV-2 entry.

Thanks for the opportunity to share the work. We appreciate it.

>> Thank you for doing the work and thank you for

explaining in a way that I could understand it.

[LAUGHTER] That was very helpful and very intriguing, I appreciate that.

We've talked about how we might have new therapies to prevent the spread,

I'd like to talk to Jason Sampson.

Jason, IF you could give us an update on where
is Washington State University particularly the Pullman Campus,
where are we with regard to the spread?

Is there any information you can share with us about the numbers?

I know we had, as I mentioned earlier,
in August at the beginning of the semester we saw a significant increase.
My understanding is the numbers have been decreasing ever
since but I'd like you to fill us in if you could.

>> Thanks Phil. I appreciate the introduction there.

Yes, we have been having a really good reduction in
the number of cases in Whitman County which has been a really big positive for us.

We like to look at it as a two-week total because that
gives us a better picture of what's currently happening versus trying to
include those August because those cases in August are not active right now and they're
not really contributing to coronavirus in our current state right now.

If we look at WSU,
we've had 79 cases over a two-week period and obviously we don't live on islands,
so the county itself, not counting WSU, is at 158 over that same time period,
which gives us 237 cases.

If you look at a lot of the metrics on the state and other counties,
they like to put it in cases per 100,000.

If we do the quick math and I carry the one and then I hope I did it right,
right about 441 cases per 100,000.

That's a really important number to look at.

If we look at regionally,

that's really important to look at,

that same time that we've had 237 cases,

Asotin county which is Clarkston is 284,

Latah County and Moscow primarily is 410 and the big one is Lewiston,

Idaho, they have 803 cases over this two-week period.

While we were doing really good and we should be very happy about the position we're in,

it's important to think about

our employees and things like that that live in those areas.

That they're actually seeing a pretty sharp rise and that has resulted in some of

the staff from the governors of both Idaho and Washington as we come upon the holidays.

As Mary Jo and Kirk have both mentioned and Colleen's testing plan,

currently we've done 8,624 tests from Cougar Health Services,

Range Health, and the National Guard.

This last week, it's been the three biggest days probably that we'll see so far.

We had about 400 tests on Monday.

We folded up up with 500 tests on Tuesday and based on the lines that I saw this morning,

we're going to have a similar numbers today.

The good news with that is we're getting a pretty good picture of what

our percent positivity is in our WSU community.

This morning, there's the results we got from those Monday testings.

Just after a quick look at them,

we're only looking at about 20 cases in that 400.

That's around at five percent positivity or lower.

That's a really good direction we're moving

because as a lot of you might remember last time I spoke,

we were in the double digits around 15 percent,
so we're definitely moving in the correct direction.

Obviously, some of that's a result of just more testing
but our case count also is trending in the correct direction.

All in all, we're looking good.

Just like to reiterate what Kirk had mentioned earlier,
a lot of the cases right now are not students.

We're actually seeing it in our employees
more than we are actually seeing it in the student population.

The reason is, we're still seeing gatherings and that socializing outside of work.

We're not seeing that transmission again in the workplace.

Primarily not seeing it in any of those interactions.

It's happening in our social interactions outside of that controlled environment.

That's why we really like to ask people to wear their masks, distance when possible,
and just be careful who is in your bubble or your cohort during these holidays.

Obviously Washington there's a little bit more restriction, so if you
do meet up with those people you've been seeing all summer,
make sure that's outdoors.

More ventilation is better for that transmission.

>> Great. Thank you, Jason.

I know that one of the concerns I think,
and actually the president mentioned this that as a reminder to everybody,
WSU is doing contact tracing for all WSU related cases.

Jason has a team of about 24 staff who've been trained by
our county public health officials to be official contact tracers.

But one of the things that we've seen is that people aren't necessarily being completely

forthcoming if they test positive with regard to the people they've interacted with.

Can you talk a little bit about that Jason?

>> Sure. I think a lot of people sometimes when they get a positive test,

you feel like you had a gathering with family and friends and you want to protect them because you feel like you're giving that information to

a healthy program that's going to restrict them.

Maybe you had a gathering and maybe you had 12 people over and you were only supposed to have 12 so you think you were preventing yourself from possibly getting in trouble.

Know that all the information you share with contact tracers is protected, it's not shared with others.

As you see, I'm doing an overview but we're not giving

details about anybody or any place.

It just gives us a picture of where those possible cases are and

we want to make sure that the people that were in close contact with the positive,

know they were in close contact so they can actually

possibly at least slow that transmission.

There's lots of cases so there's a lot of potential sources, but maybe if we

control each source from reducing the overall transmission within the community.

Now, if you still don't want to share those names even though you know it's protected,

please reach out to them directly yourself and tell them how they

can reach out to us and we'll talk them through this scenario.

So that is another way to do it,

but please just talk to the contact tracers,

we're not trying to get anybody in trouble.

It's really truly about transmission and we do not

share any specific information with anybody.

We have seen a lot of cooperation within the community, we're really talking about just a few people that don't want to share something about gatherings or things like that but no, it's truly in the best interest of our community and region.

>> Definitely. Thank you.

Jason, another question.

We had a question that someone had submitted online a couple of days ago and they were wondering, if there has been any fatalities related to COVID-19 within the WSU community? Can you address that?

>> Sure. As everybody probably knows right now, unfortunately we've had some fatalities in Whitman County. I don't want to diminish the fact that people have died because it is very tragic, but none of these have been associated with WSU.

They're all within the community.

Obviously, it's known that there was a spread, an outbreak in a long-term healthcare where some of those were associated. There's some other ones out there but it's not associated with WSU, but we should still be conscientious that these are tragedies for a lot of people that were associated with those fatalities.

>> Yeah, I agree.

Thanks Jason. President Schulz, we're getting close to the top of the hour.

Any last remarks from you before we are done for this session?

We have, as I said, another one at five o'clock.

>> Well, thank you Phil and [NOISE] thank you to my colleagues here who've talked about some of the exciting research and scholarly work that they're doing, as well as just to our continued leadership team working on managing the COVID-19 response in our community. I think Phil, if anything I want to just end on a little bit of the same note that I began with.

Three things: wear a mask, wash your hands, watch your distance and be safe Cougs. Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with everybody today.

>> Well Kirk, I'm going to echo that as well.

I know as Mary Jo mentioned, I think we're all experiencing COVID fatigue, but now is not the time for us to let down our guard. We really do need to be more vigilant than ever. Unfortunately, across the country we're seeing dramatic increases in the number of infections and that is a really chilling statistic. We all have to be really conscious to the fact that there are things that we can do ourselves to keep ourselves healthy and to keep our loved ones healthy and we've got to do one final big push hopefully before we can get the handle on this, but now is not the time for us to let up. Particularly as we enter this period of time where traditionally we get together with family members, with friends, this is not the season.

This is not the year for us to be getting together and it's painful and it's tempting to say, well, I can make an exception for myself but I do sincerely ask that we all be vigilant, do the right thing so that we can all get together with our friends and family next season.

With that, as I mentioned, we do have another town hall scheduled this evening at 5:00 PM and it is aimed as I mentioned before at primarily students and their family members. If you are a student or a loved one of a student and you're interested in learning more about what the spring semester is going to look like I strongly encourage you to tune in.

Again, you can go to the same place that you went to to get this particular YouTube feed that's experience.wsu.edu.

Again, tonight at 5:00 PM.

Also, our 14th system-wide COVID-19 town hall is scheduled for Wednesday, December 9th.

That will be the last town hall of this semester.

We are already planning our town hall schedule for next semester and I'll just give us a preview. The president's commission on the status of women specifically has requested that we do a town hall aimed at caregivers and talking about resources and programs that are available to caregivers.

We've all heard about the challenges that family members are having trying to maintain their work life on Zoom, trying to help children with their school work, many of whom are having to study remotely.

It is a really, really difficult and challenging period of time.

We're hopefully going to be able to spend

an entire hour addressing some of the issues and concerns with caregivers.

Watch for that,

that will happen after the first of the year and

that will be our first town hall topic in the spring semester.

With that, I want to thank all of our panelists.

I appreciate you all spending time with us.

Also, I would like to thank the subject matter experts,

I've been monitoring the chat feature in

YouTube and we continue to get a lot of good questions

and it looks like there's been quite a few

of those questions being answered in real time.

So thank you to our subject matter experts.

Finally, I want to thank all of you for joining us.

This is an opportunity for us to talk to

a large number of people to answer the questions that

we've been receiving both online and

in the chat and so we know it takes time out of your day,

but we really do appreciate you spending your time

with us and giving us this chance to have a conversation.

Enjoy the rest of your week and as always, go Cougs.