8AM Covid-19 Response Call
December 3, 2021

Agenda

- Covid-19 update – Led by Ian A. Waitz, with the Covid-19 Testing Team, Emergency Management, Medical, Classroom Notifications and Support Team

    - Latest trends on campus post-Thanksgiving

    - Communicating positives (refreshers)

    - Academic continuity

    - Omicron variant

    - Boosters

- Q&A – All

In one graph … expected, but concerning

The rate of positive COVID-19 tests in the past seven days is MIT's highest this semester.
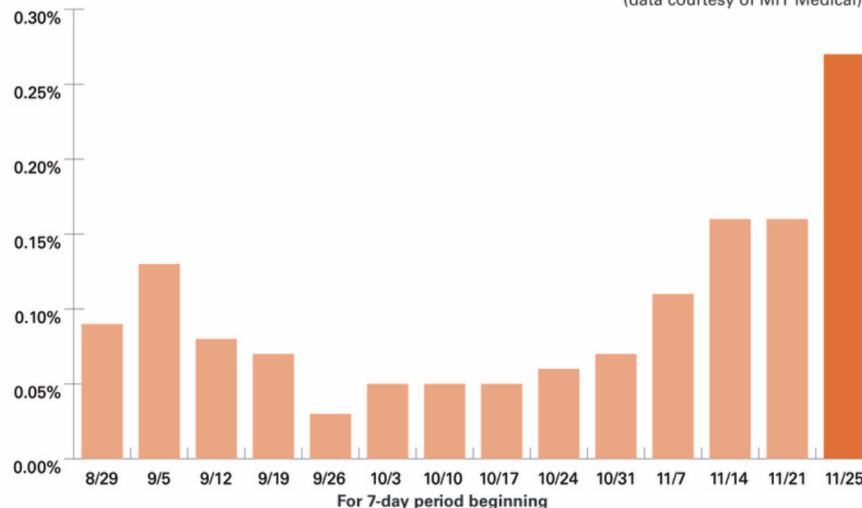
Arun Wongprommoon–The Tech

Dec. 1, 2021

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Rate of Positive COVID-19 Tests at MIT During Fall 2021, by Week
(data courtesy of MIT Medical)

For 7-day period beginning

Dashboard update and themes from cases

Expected post Thanksgiving increase

- Overall case counts are increasing (0.27% positive rate)
- Positives remain related to off-campus social interactions with food and drink, social interactions without masking, household contact of positive cases, recent travel, exposures to non-MIT positive cases off campus.
- Still very limited on-campus transmission

Now more than ever, remain vigilant

- Please continue to follow masking and tap-in requirements, and be courteous to others if they remind you to do the same.
- We are at a critical time in the semester and want to maintain academic continuity as much as possible.

Attest, test, mask (repeat)

Testing 2x/week for students, 1x/week for staff

- It's (still) working.

- Self-observed testing is easy and efficient.

Attesting is also working!

- A number of positives caught from people reporting symptoms

- The quickest way to get instructions/advice from MIT Medical

Off-ramp planning is still a priority

- No significant changes expected until at least next semester.

- Paying close attention to changing conditions.

Communicating positives (refresher)

Stop, breathe, hold internal communications.

- **If an instructor tests positive:** Instructors should **contact their department head**, who will attempt to find an in-person replacement. The department should alert the Covid-19 Class Notification and Support Team, which will be available to assist with the department leadership.

- **If a student tests positive in a class setting:** The Covid-19 Class Notification and Support Team will notify instructors. You can email questions to CovidClassHelp@mit.edu. See flow chart (next page).

- **If a staff member tests positive:** DLC heads will be notified if a positive occurs in their org structure. If you hear the news before receiving this notification, you can contact your HR rep.

When in doubt about what to say (or if to say anything), contact Steve Bradt.

What to do (and not do) and what happens
if a student in a class tests positive

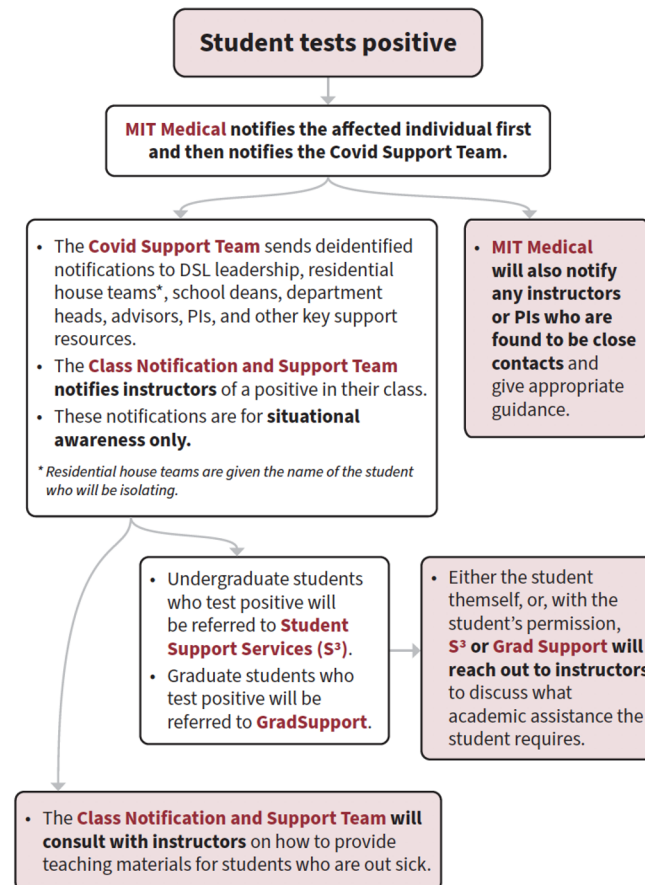### Take a breath. Hold all communications. Review what happens next.

- **Do not email the students** in your class about a positive case.
- If you are worried or have questions, reach out to **CovidClassHelp@mit.edu**.

Key Points

- There are different protocols for vaccinated close contacts (no quarantine) versus unvaccinated close contacts (must quarantine).
    - **MIT Medical** makes this determination (including who is a close contact).
    - **Do not** make assumptions or determinations on your own.
    - **Do not** conduct your own investigation.

- The Institute's 2×/week testing protocol for students is robust and based on a strong scientific foundation.
    - It takes 3–5 days for an exposed person to convert to positive, so our testing protocol for students (every 3–4 days) naturally works to limit spread early in the disease cycle.
    - The **contact tracing team** has expertise and experience for how to handle individual and multiple cases.

Keep on Teaching (as you were).

- There is no expectation for instructors to adopt hybrid teaching, but we encourage you to review ways to provide academic assistance to students who are isolating: tll.mit.edu/teaching-resources/fall-2021-teaching-resources
- There is no need to communicate with your class about the positive.
- In the event of rumors, contact **medical@mit.edu** and let us know what you are hearing.

Student tests positive

↓

MIT Medical notifies the affected individual first and then notifies the Covid Support Team.

- The **Covid Support Team** sends deidentified notifications to DSL leadership, residential house teams*, school deans, department heads, advisors, PIs, and other key support resources.
- The **Class Notification and Support Team** notifies instructors of a positive in their class.
- These notifications are for **situational awareness only.**

Residential house teams are given the name of the student who will be isolating.

- **MIT Medical will also notify any instructors or PIs who are found to be close contacts** and give appropriate guidance.

- Undergraduate students who test positive will be referred to **Student Support Services (S³)**.
- Graduate students who test positive will be referred to **GradSupport**.

- Either the student themself, or, with the student's permission, **S³ or Grad Support will reach out to instructors** to discuss what academic assistance the student requires.

- The **Class Notification and Support Team will consult with instructors** on how to provide teaching materials for students who are out sick.

Revised 2021-09-10

Academic continuity

- Growing concern that some students are not reporting symptoms for fear that they might have to miss class, especially, this late in the semester and with finals looming.

    - UA Survey (~1000 responses, key concern = lack of support for missing classes)
    - Some of those classes have resources available
    - *Instructors please communicate how students who must miss class will be supported*
    - Please reach out for help and resources (https://tll.mit.edu/teaching-resources/fall-2021-teaching-resources/)
    - The Chair of the Faculty has also been in contact with departments and instructors

- There is a parallel concern of some community members not taking minor symptoms seriously. *Ignoring symptoms (esp. if they turn out to be Covid) can put many others at risk.*

Omicron

What we know…

- On 11/26/2021, WHO declared SARS-CoV-2 variant B.1.1.529 as a Variant of Concern (VOC), now designated as Omicron
    - Reported to WHO by South Africa on 11/24, after noting a steep rise in cases coincident with the detection of B.1.1.529 variant
- As of today, Omicron has been detected in 24 countries including the United States; in South Africa it represents 73% of the cases (source: GISAID)
- B.1.1.529 has 32 mutations on the spike protein alone. For comparison, Delta had 9 changes on the spike protein. B.1.1.529 does not have previous Delta "ancestors" and likely mutated over time in one, likely immunocompromised, individual
- These mutations likely result in increased transmissibility

What we don't know…

- Does Omicron cause more or less severe disease?
- We should know more in 2-3 weeks

Omicron (continued)

Does this change what we are doing?

- Not really. Our requirements and policies position us well for Omicron.

- We should continue to be cautious in our interactions and continue to wear masks.

- Everyone who is eligible should get a booster as soon as possible.

Boosters

CDC Update / Recommendation

- As of this week, the CDC is advising that all individuals 18 and older SHOULD get a COVID-19 booster vaccine.

MIT Position (letter to the community from Cecilia Stuopis)

- MIT has not yet determined whether it will require booster vaccines for students and employees.

- For community members engaging in MIT-sponsored travel, MIT *will* require COVID-19 booster vaccines beginning on **December 17.**

- MIT Medical is offering appointments for boosters (now sold out; 2600 in 3 hours!); looking to add more.

Boosters

Covid Pass / Vaccine

- Upload function now available for Boosters

Thoughts on what's next (redux)

- We are watching conditions carefully

- There are three (unsurprising) scenarios for the coming months:
    - **things get worse** (winter wave): Keep our current policies.
    - **things stay the same**: Keep our current policies.
    - **things get better**: We start to relax our current policies.

WE ARE HERE

Closing comments

- Good news: we've made it to December with almost all aspects of our mission enabled!

- Even with the expected Thanksgiving increase, cases have been relatively low all semester.

- There's been no need to move to remote teaching & learning.

- Community members have been flexible and adaptable—but, understandably, we would all like this to end (and we are hoping and planning for that)....

- We will continue to get through this together.

Q&A