

## Important Message from the Provost: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

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Dear University Community,

As the situation with coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to evolve, we are sharing this message to keep our University community updated. For the most up-to-date information, we encourage you to frequently check the Office of the Provost's webpage for the University's response to COVID-19 [[usm.edu/provost/coronavirus](http://usm.edu/provost/coronavirus)] and the [Moffitt Health Center](#) for the latest information on health and safety related to COVID-19. That information on the Provost's office website is also found below.

Note that University-affiliated travel (by students, faculty, and staff) to areas now under a CDC Alert Level 2 (Sustained Community Transmission, Practice Enhanced Precautions), as well as CDC Warning Level 3 (Avoid All Nonessential Travel) OR U.S. Department of State Advisory Level 4 (Do Not Travel due to COVID-19), is under a USM travel prohibition until further notice. This currently includes travel to China, Iran, South Korea, Italy, and Japan.

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Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

### Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

The University of Southern Mississippi continues to actively monitor the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) due to infection with novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). People in numerous countries, including the United States, have been affected. **At this time, there are no confirmed cases of coronavirus at The University of Southern Mississippi or in the State of Mississippi.**

The University's Emergency Management Team and Moffitt Health Center remain in contact with Mississippi public health officials to ensure that we are following the latest information, trends, and guidance from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). Additionally, we are following alerts and recommendations from the [U.S. Department of State](#).

The safety and well-being of the University community is always our highest priority. We will update this page as needed to keep our campus community informed.

### Recent Student and Faculty Travel

Students and faculty that recently returned from travel to South Korea and Europe have been screened. Fortunately, their travel was outside of the outbreak areas, but we continue to monitor their health and well-being. Their status remains "very-low risk" for infection. Nevertheless, they are being assessed

regularly to ensure University and community safety, and nearly all the travelers are near or beyond the incubation period for COVID-19.

### **Symptoms**

**If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after travel from any affected country or area with active community transmission**, you should call ahead to Moffitt Health Center or your primary healthcare provider and mention your symptoms and recent travel. **If you have had close contact with someone showing these symptoms who has recently traveled from any affected country or area with active community transmission**, you should likewise call Moffitt Health Center or your primary healthcare provider and mention your close contact and their recent travel. At this time, your healthcare provider will work with the Mississippi State Department of Health and CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19.

### **If you are returning from an affected country or area**

*Note that University-affiliated travel (by students, faculty, and staff) to areas under a CDC Alert Level 2 (Sustained Community Transmission, Practice Enhanced Precautions), CDC Warning Level 3 (Avoid All Nonessential Travel), OR U.S. Department of State Advisory Level 4 (Do Not Travel due to COVID-19) is under a USM travel prohibition until further notice. This currently includes travel to China, Iran, South Korea, Italy, and Japan.*

The University will work with state and local public health officials to determine the best plan for when and how [returning students, faculty, and staff](#) might return to the U.S. and Hattiesburg. This will be dictated by [current rules and guidelines](#) by the CDC and Mississippi State Department of Health.

[If you have traveled to one of these areas](#) or have been exposed to someone sick with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, you will face some limitations on your movement and activity. This measure is in place to assist you and protect the health and safety of our community.

- **Students, Faculty and Staff:** Please call Student Health Services at Moffitt Health Center at 601-266-5390 for additional evaluation and [information](#) or contact your primary provider.
- **Community members:** Please call your doctor for additional evaluation and information.

### **If you are scheduled to travel to an affected area**

Conditions, alerts, and information regarding any country can change at any time. Check CDC and State Department recommendations frequently. University personnel travel and programs scheduled to areas under

- CDC Alert Level 2 (Sustained Community Transmission, Practice Enhanced Precautions), OR
- CDC Warning Level 3, or
- U.S. State Department Travel Advisory 4

due to COVID-19 are under a USM travel prohibition until further notice. This currently includes travel to China, Iran, Italy, Japan, and South Korea.

Spring and summer programs in these areas will be cancelled or suspended. This currently includes Italy, Japan, and South Korea. We continue to monitor all summer programs for changes in status.

Students whose programs have been cancelled or suspended either by USM or the host program should return to their home countries and follow the recommendations under “If you are returning from an affected country or area” above.

For additional information, contact the campus coordinator of your travel or program.

The University also strongly recommends that everyone reconsider **personal** travel to any country with any of the following advisories, due to COVID-19:

- CDC Alert Level 2 (Sustained Community Transmission, Practice Enhanced Precautions), OR
- CDC Warning Level 3 (Avoid Non-Essential Travel), OR
- U.S. State Department Travel Advisory Level 3 (Reconsider Travel), OR
- U.S. State Department Travel Advisory Level 4 (Do Not Travel).

If you have questions about scheduled University travel to an area under any CDC level or what these restrictions mean for you, please contact the Office of Study Abroad.

### **Preventing the illness**

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends everyday preventive actions, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

These are everyday habits that can help prevent the spread of several viruses. The CDC also offers specific guidance for travelers.

### **[CDC Risk Assessment and Management Recommendations](#)**

#### **What happens if a case is identified?**

**At this time, there are no confirmed cases of coronavirus at The University of Southern Mississippi or in the State of Mississippi.** The CDC, Mississippi State Department of Health, and local and University health care experts will be integrally involved if a case is detected in our area. We remain in close contact with them to understand their protocols and refine our plans as the recommendations from national and state authorities evolve and change.

The University has a robust infectious disease (pandemic) emergency response plan and contingency plans that can be called into place if needed. Additional updates on these plans will be posted as needed.

### **USM Support**

The fear and uncertainty that accompanies widespread illness can lead to many reactions. University community members may have friends and family overseas who are affected and may be anxious or sad about the situation. They may also be overwhelmed by the amount of media coverage, both through news channels and social media.

This is a time when we all need to be understanding and compassionate to people who may be affected by the news. Please treat all members of our community with respect and empathy as our University and communities throughout the world deals with this emerging illness. Panic and generalization and the associated stigmatization of individuals impacted by the illness could negatively impact our ability to respond appropriately to a COVID-19 outbreak, should it occur.

### **Contact Information**

USM Student Health Services at Moffitt Health Center 601-266-5390

USM Dean of Students Office 601-266-6028

Mississippi State Department of Health Hotline 877-978-6453