

# **UW-Madison: Statement from Chancellor Rebecca Blank on COVID-19 and off-campus enforcement**

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UW-Madison shares a common goal with the City of Madison, Dane County and Public Health Madison & Dane County of reducing COVID-19 infections in our community. The best way to accomplish this goal is not by issuing press releases calling for students to leave, but to partner in developing collaborative solutions for the benefit of all residents.

In recent weeks, UW-Madison has taken a strong series of steps to control infections among students, including quarantining our two largest residence halls and implementing two weeks of remote instruction. As a result, our infection numbers have fallen substantially in the past week.

We have run more than 36,000 tests since August and are testing our campus population at a far higher proportion than the Dane County community at large. We also plan to take all appropriate steps to ensure that Badger football does not create a negative impact.

In short, we are working hard to control the areas under our jurisdiction and are cautiously optimistic that we're making progress.

But you don't need to look hard on social media to find a photo of long lines outside downtown bars or parties in large apartment buildings, or other places where 18- to 24-year-olds are gathering. This comes despite our efforts to educate and enforce our health protocols through the hundreds of hours UW-Madison staff have spent visiting off campus spaces and discouraging large gatherings, and the hundreds of student misconduct investigations for actions on campus and off.

We know these gatherings can lead to the spread of COVID-19 but UW-Madison does not have jurisdiction to shut down gatherings in off campus areas. Until those

agencies with enforcement authority take additional action, we shouldn't expect to see a rapid decline in cases in Dane County.

We call on the County Executive's Office to step forward and become a partner in promoting and enforcing safe behavior in off-campus spaces.

Students are an important part of the Madison community. You can't simply wish them away, nor should you. This is where students live, where they work, where they vote and their presence supports hundreds of local businesses and the Dane County economy.

As we've said repeatedly, the university could close its residence halls and move to all online instruction and there will still be tens of thousands of students who would opt to honor their apartment leases and stay in Madison, as they did this past spring. It's wishful thinking to suggest otherwise.

It's long past time to stop arguing. We'd welcome a conversation on how we can work together to help our community.