



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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For Immediate Release: September 1, 2020

To: Jackson County Community & Stakeholders

From: Jackson County Department of Public Health

Re: Jackson County Department of Public Health Identifies COVID-19 Cluster at WCU Residence Hall

The Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH) has identified a COVID-19 cluster at a Western Carolina University (WCU) Residence Hall. The North Carolina Division of Public Health (NCDPH) defines clusters of COVID-19 in workplace, educational, and other community settings as: 1) A minimum of 5 cases with illness onsets or initial positive results within a 14-day period AND, 2) plausible linkage between cases where cases were present in the same setting during the same time-period (e.g., same shift, same classroom, same physical work area); that the timing fits with likely timing of exposure; and that there is no other more likely source of exposure for identified cases (e.g., household or close contact to a confirmed case in another setting).

Seventeen (17) residents of Harrill Hall at WCU have tested positive for COVID-19. All positive individuals are following isolation orders. The investigation is ongoing. Symptomatic individuals who test positive will be required to remain in isolation under the following conditions: 1) At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared AND, 2) At least 24 hours have passed since the last fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, AND 3) Symptoms (like cough and shortness of breath) have improved. Asymptomatic individuals who test positive will be required to remain in isolation under the following conditions: 1) At least 10 days have passed since their positive test assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.

JCDPH and WCU Health Services are working to identify any additional close contacts of these residents. The CDC defines close contact as being within approximately 6 feet of a person with an infection with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time of 15 minutes during their period of infectivity. Based on information provided by the residents, county health officials will assess risks of exposure, determine which if any additional measures are needed, quarantine and/or testing.

“We expected there to be cases related to our campus as more than 9,000 students returned for residential in-person instruction this fall. We have extensive protocols in place and will continue to execute our quarantine and isolation procedures. Public health is a shared responsibility – and it is one that we take seriously. We’ve implemented a series of standards including a mask mandate, lowering classroom density, extensive PPE and cleaning procedures and many other protocols through our [Catamounts Care](#) initiative. Additionally, we have erected outdoor tents throughout campus for student, faculty and staff use. We continue to evaluate conditions that may influence our ability to deliver residential operations,” said Chancellor Kelli R. Brown, Western Carolina University.

For information about COVID-19, look to reliable sources like JCDPH, NCDHHS, and the CDC. Visit JCDPH’s website at <http://health.jacksonnc.org/covid19>. For COVID-19 questions, call the Jackson County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at 828-631-HELP.

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