

COVID Data Sharing FAQs: Risk Assessment and Reducing Viral Transmission

(1) I'm nervous about coming to campus. What should I do?

Being nervous about coming to campus is not an unreasonable response in this moment, and it is important to arm yourself with data and knowledge that is useful. Below we try to outline what is most crucial in assessing your risk, both in the community and on campus – even if these data are not what others are sharing or perhaps the data you think you want.

(2) I want to know how many NKU faculty, staff, and students have tested positive. Other universities are posting these data. Why isn't NKU?

Unlike most of the universities that have been posting positive test numbers, NKU has a regionally based student population with proportionally fewer residential students. At the moment, less than a third of our courses have any face-to-face component and only 18% of them are completely in person. And many of our faculty and staff are working partially or fully remotely. As a result, knowing how many people affiliated with NKU have tested positive is likely not helpful information to have because the majority of NKU folk are not coming to campus or are only coming onto campus intermittently.

(3) I would like to know how many people who are regularly on campus have tested positive. Why can't I know that?

The first answer to this question is that it is virtually impossible to track exactly who is on campus and when, especially for students. But more importantly, this information is also not terribly helpful if you are trying to ascertain your risk in coming to campus on any particular day. Positive tests are lagging indicators, especially now when it is taking 2-7 days to receive test results back. Hence, the number of positive cases for any given day would only tell us about who was positive and spreading virus in the past (and who is now not on campus, so would not be spreading the virus there). Likewise, presenting the campus as having low numbers of cases could instill a false sense of security and lead some to more lax safety practices. This can be very dangerous – and is one practice that has gotten other campuses into trouble, particularly around student gatherings. Anything other than a PCR test is not fully reliable and will miss a number of positive cases. Additionally, we know there are cases that go undetected – either because the carrier is asymptomatic or because the person doesn't get tested. Even if we did broadcast the number of known cases each day, it would not paint an accurate picture of risk on campus for that day.

(4) How do I assess risk then?

The NKU community is embedded primarily in the counties of northern Kentucky and the Cincinnati region. And most of the NKU community spends the majority of its time there. Therefore, paying attention to regional data, [especially the data that we have posted](#), will provide you with a way to assess your risk, for what happens to our region is also what is happening to the NKU community.

Our dashboard shows total number of known active cases (people most likely to be shedding the virus) for both northern Kentucky and Cincinnati. It also highlights the number of active

cases for regional residents ages 20-29 in northern Kentucky because this group constitutes the majority of people associated with NKU and because this age group currently has the highest rate of cases among all age groups. We also show the average number of new cases as a 7-day rolling average by county and whether this number is increasing or decreasing from day to day. This can help you understand in general terms the trend for cases for each of the primary counties in NKU's catchment area. Finally, we show the rate of transmission for both Kentucky and Ohio, with a red bar that demarcates the point at which the rate of spread of cases stops slowing and begins accelerating, which will tell you in general terms whether the number of cases across our states is decreasing or increasing. All of these data should help you determine your own comfort level with going out in public or coming to campus.

Important to realize is that as much as we are part of northern Kentucky, NKU is part of the region. Any spike in cases on our campus would be reflected in our dashboard numbers. This is another reason why the number of active cases for ages 20-29 is highlighted and tracked across time on our site: if there were a spike in cases among our traditional student group, then it would be easily discernable.

(4) Do you use these data to determine the trigger points for closing NKU's campus? And what are NKU's trigger points?

We are not actually using these data specifically to determine the manner of NKU's business operations. From an enterprise point of view, we need to know whether we are able to deliver our educational and support programs to our students successfully. To answer this question, how many people are in quarantine or in isolation is likely more important than how many have tested positive. If there are a lot of people who need to be on campus but who are quarantined, even if they are not sick or have not tested positive, then we may not be able to serve our students as we want to. However, we could also have many people who are quarantining, even who have tested positive for COVID-19, but they are all working remotely and feel fine, so their situation would not impact our operations at all. It is a complicated equation for which there is no easy solution. Consequently, NKU is proceeding by understanding regional trends with as much nuance as possible and carefully monitoring how those trends are impacting our day-to-day operations.

(5) How do I to mitigate risk if we don't know what the risk is for being on campus?

The best and primary way to mitigate risk is to wear a mask and socially distance at all times. Many studies now have repeatedly shown that these two interventions, coupled with hand washing and cleaning high touch surfaces, prevent the vast majority of viral spread. We can never know with certainty if we or the people we interact with are positive for the virus (because we are contagious even prior to symptoms and many positive individuals are asymptomatic.) Recognizing this fact, we need to mask and social distance ourselves when interacting with people at all times -- whether on campus or in the community.

(6) But I'm still very nervous about coming to campus.

Being nervous about coming to campus is still not unreasonable. It probably is a good idea to be wary about returning to anything face-to-face at this time. If nothing else, being wary will help

you maintain healthy practices and to be more aware of what practices people around you are engaging in. At the same time, regular COVID communication from the university will continue for the foreseeable future, and you will be notified of any developments regarding spread—either on campus or regionally.

In summary: because NKU is largely a commuter campus, it is the case that what is happening in our communities is the best indicator for forecasting trends on campus. Knowing whether people have tested positive is information coming too late, for they will already be in isolation before you learn of the cases. We need to be able to see what is likely to happen. To see that, we need to understand what is going on where our faculty, staff, and students are living and many of them are working. If cases are rising in our communities, then they will likely be rising for NKU affiliates as well. Conversely and importantly: if the number of cases increase on campus, then the cases in our communities will also rise. We will do everything we can to help keep focus on the data that matters for the NKU family and to share that information with you as clearly and as transparently as possible.