Thank you to all members of the ECU campus community for continuing to embrace a spirit of service by adhering to our community expectations as we navigate this important time for our university. It will take all of us operating as ONE ECU to successfully manage through this Delta variant phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful for the intentionality with which members of the ECU community have approached the first weeks of the Fall 2021 Semester.

The weekly COVID matrix analysis and scoring on Friday resulted in no change in risk level or Community Expectations. While some parameters have improved, we continue to be concerned by increased case counts and high transmissibility on campus, as well as our local hospital operating near capacity. Vidant Medical Center has seen an inpatient surge followed by some recent leveling and reductions, but feel we need to see continued reductions before we can rely on this being a continuing trend.

The matrix scoring continues to be challenging due to some subjectivity inherent in some of the criteria. With the health and safety of our campus community at the forefront, we are taking a conservative approach guided by the best information available from our medical, public health and research experts in Student Health Services, the Brody School of Medicine, Vidant Medical Center and the UNC System.

In the future, an ECU Official will only be distributed if changes are made to the university’s Community Expectations, such as updates to the mask mandate or gathering restrictions.

Below is the data driving the risk criteria scoring and measures being taken to help reduce our risk levels.

Improvements:

- The campus community vaccination rate rose above 60% due to an additional 38 employee attestations and 943 students providing proof of vaccination in the myPIRATEchart system. The ECU vaccination rate of 61% is significantly higher than the Pitt County rate of 46%.
- According to the NC COVID Dashboard, the Pitt County (community) risk level based on cases per 10,000 residents improved, moving from a HIGH to a MODERATE risk level.
- Campus quarantine and isolation space has sufficient capacity at just above 80% or 383 rooms available.

Concerns:
• ECU case rates and transmissibility are high and still increasing with a positivity rate between 7% and 10% this past week.
• Vidant Medical Center is nearing capacity. Recent data denotes a slight decrease in inpatient cases but requires continued monitoring to identify a continuing positive trend.

Control Measures:
• Continuing to emphasize vaccination and proper mask wearing indoors.
• Increased surveillance testing by 39% last week compared to the prior week.
• Increased staffing in the Contact Tracing group to allow for faster identification of contacts and to quarantine/isolate those individuals to limit virus spread.
• Contact Tracing is working with the provost, deans, department chairs and faculty to collect class seating charts to greatly enhance their contact identification efforts.
• Creative Services in University Communications developed signage that illustrates proper mask wearing. The signage is available on Return of Pirate Nation for printing and use in buildings or for download as a PowerPoint slide for faculty to use in their classrooms.

We are still operating under the “elevated risk” due to the continued increase of positive cases over the last week and high transmissibility of the Delta variant. We will continue to combat this trend by encouraging and providing safe, free and effective vaccines while also requiring mask wearing indoors until case counts are sufficiently reduced and vaccination rates increase. Dean of Students Lynn Roeder and ECU Police Capt. Chris Sutton are working with several deans and faculty members to communicate with students in larger classrooms about the importance of proper mask wearing.

Finally, contact tracing staff have been added and surveillance testing capacity continues to increase thanks to our College of Nursing faculty and other health care partners. In the last week, our surveillance testing increased 39% from the prior week. The contact tracing unit is working with faculty and administrators to compile seating charts to improve the effectiveness of identifying positive contacts.

Thank you to our faculty for leading the way with 88% attesting to being vaccinated and an overall employee vaccination rate of 77%. Students responded this week with nearly 1,000 becoming fully vaccinated or uploading proof of vaccination on myPIRATEchart. Thanks to these students and employees, our campus community has passed the 60% vaccination rate. Increased vaccinations improve our community’s protection from virus spread and more serious outcomes for those who do contract the virus.

All of us, working together as a community, will help reduce our case numbers and the chance for hospitalization or worse. We cannot let up on the gas, yet. Let’s continue to work together and support one another. Remember: Pirates Protect Pirates!
Bill Koch
Associate Vice Chancellor
Co-Chair, COVID Coordination Committee
Campus Safety & Auxiliary Services