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ADPH, UAB evolving campus entry efforts with launch of multifunctional GuideSafe™ Platform

Platform includes Exposure Notification System app piloting today across the state

BIRMINGHAM (Aug. 3, 2020) – The Alabama Department of Public Health and The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), a part of The University of Alabama System, today provided an update on Alabama’s evolving campus entry program for higher education students as they return to campuses across the state.

Gov. Kay Ivey elected to use more than \$30 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to provide robust testing, symptom monitoring and notification of exposure to COVID-19 for students in all public and private institutions in the state of Alabama – making this the most comprehensive higher-education entry plan in the country.

Highlighting today’s briefing was the official launch of GuideSafe™, a multitool platform encompassing the formerly announced Stay Safe Together™ and Testing for Alabama initiatives, and comprised of three key components: GuideSafe™ HealthCheck, GuideSafe™ Exposure Notification Application and GuideSafe™ Event Passport. Also included under the GuideSafe™ platform are key spread mitigation behaviors for ongoing mass adoption.

State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris said, “Alabama’s priorities in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic are protecting the health and safety of its residents while safeguarding their privacy. We appreciate this innovative partnership which will harness technology to accelerate exposure notification and help slow the spread of COVID-19.”

“As students and educators make the transition back to our college campuses, it is critical that they have the tools to do so safely, and I am proud to provide the resources to help make that possible. Not only is this partnership enabling our colleges and universities to welcome back their students, it is also setting the tone and bar for the rest of the nation,” Governor Ivey said. “Alabama is innovative and, during a health crisis, we are showing the country the great benefit of partnership, ingenuity and determination.”

“We are pleased to provide the GuideSafe™ platform to all public colleges and universities across our state,” said Finis St. John, UA System Chancellor. “We appreciate the opportunity to work with Governor Ivey and her team to bring this project forward and help Alabama’s citizens during this unprecedented time.”

Exposure Notification App pilot launching today

Key to today’s GuideSafe™ update was the announcement that the closed pilot phase of the platform’s anonymous Exposure Notification System (ENS) app officially launched today. College students across the Alabama will be invited to participate, and any individual in the

state of Alabama with a .edu email address is encouraged to sign up to participate in the pilot phase.

This pilot app – built by UAB and Birmingham-based MotionMobs in conjunction with ADPH and integrating Google and Apple's ENS – is targeting up to 10,000 Apple iPhone and 10,000 Google Android downloads. Once the pilot phase has ended later this month, the GuideSafe™ app will be assessed and made available for mass public download via iPhone and Android devices.

Alabama is one of the first states in the U.S. to launch Google and Apple's joint exposure notification technology.

“We have worked extremely hard to leverage research and innovation, community service, patient care and education to make a positive difference in this pandemic,” said UAB President Ray L. Watts. “This new app – using Google- and Apple-led technology and created by UAB faculty, staff and MotionMobs for the people of Alabama – is a necessary tool in our effort to return to college campuses safely this fall.”

Participation with the GuideSafe™ app is voluntary and is designed to protect privacy while anonymously alerting each user of potential exposure to those who have tested positive to COVID-19 within the past 14 days. The GuideSafe™ app enables individuals to make decisions best for them and their loved ones, such as seeking medical advice or staying home. To preserve user privacy, the ENS assigns random number codes to each user, ensuring all parties remain anonymous to each other and to the system itself.

Additional GuideSafe™ platform abilities

Complementing the GuideSafe™ app capabilities are the GuideSafe™ platform's HealthCheck and Event Passport components.

GuideSafe™ HealthCheck is a COVID-19 assessment tool that allows users to report COVID-19 related symptoms. Participation is encouraged daily, but compliance and enforcement are at the discretion of individual educational institutions. All higher education, as well as K-12, businesses and organizations, must opt in for students or employees to access and use this tool.

“The combination of these tools enables every participating college, university and K-12 school to engage faculty, students and staff regarding on-going monitoring of symptoms, exposure and risks of acquiring COVID-19,” said Sue Feldman, professor and director of graduate programs in health informatics at UAB. Feldman leads the GuideSafe™ platform with Mohanraj Thirumalai, assistant professor of UAB health informatics.

GuideSafe™ Event Passport facilitates access to facilities, meetings and events with 10 or more participants. After completing HealthCheck, an algorithm renders an event passport for presentation at events. Green means an individual is good to attend, while red means you should not attend.

“The GuideSafe™ Event Passport is about showing up healthy – or not showing up at all,” emphasized Feldman.

Testing to continue for students across Alabama

While pilots have been conducted in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa since July 26, mandatory GuideSafe™ Entry Testing (formerly Stay Safe Together™ Testing) will begin at [11 additional locations](#) across Alabama tomorrow, Aug. 4. Two additional sites will open in Marion and Talladega on Aug. 10 and Aug. 14, respectively. Students will receive communication directly from testing@guidesafe.org or testing@staysafetogether.org and be directed to a web link to register for a testing location and appointment.

The largest-scale higher education testing initiative in the nation, GuideSafe™ provides a free, non-invasive nasal swab-based procedure to ensure a negative test — or quarantining in the case of a positive result — before returning to campus. GuideSafe™ Entry Testing is required for every student attending a public or private four-year college in the state of Alabama. Additionally, all two-year college students who reside on campus are required to participate.

“Our ability to test every student returning to campus is essential in helping us maintain a safe environment,” said Selwyn Vickers, M.D., dean of the UAB School of Medicine. “Through this partnership with Governor Ivey and the state of Alabama, we have the ability to make testing available across the UA System and to all public and private colleges and universities statewide.”

George Netto, M.D., the Robert and Ruth Anderson Endowed Chair of UAB’s Department of Pathology, and his team will process every test performed on Alabama college students prior to their re-entry to their respective campus. Netto’s team adapted their lab-developed procedures to a pooling test approach. This strategy will allow for ramping testing capacity by tenfold for the next 30 days as students return to campus.

“We devised a simpler way of collecting specimens, allowing students to do a nasal swab themselves, making it faster and easier than the nasopharyngeal swab, which requires a healthcare professional to administer,” Netto said. “Using nasal swabs and our in-house developed pooling strategy will enable us to significantly ramp up capacity while maintaining full testing accuracy.”

Birmingham-based [Bruno Event Team](#) is leading onsite logistics at all GuideSafe™ Entry Testing locations across the state. All testing is secure and private through GuideSafe™’s partnership with Verily and the company’s [Healthy at Work](#) screening and testing protocols — all designed with the privacy and security of personal health information at the forefront. Onsite testing results will be provided by GuideSafe™ partner and data repository [PWN Health](#).

After entry testing is complete, GuideSafe™ will transition efforts to weekly random sentinel testing and Outbreak/Contact Testing, should one occur on any affected campus.

As college campuses and activities resume across Alabama, ADPH and UAB, along with partner organizations, will update parents, students, staff and the public about the integration of GuideSafe™ and its multifaceted components into the collective fight against COVID-19.

For more information, please visit guidesafe.org.

About UAB

Known for its innovative and interdisciplinary approach to education at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, the **University of Alabama at Birmingham** is an internationally renowned research university and academic medical center, as well as Alabama's largest employer, with some 23,000 employees, and has an annual economic impact exceeding \$7 billion on the state. The five pillars of UAB's mission include education, research, patient care, community service and economic development. UAB is a two-time recipient of the prestigious [Center for Translational Science Award](#). Learn more at www.uab.edu.

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