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For Immediate Release

### **Leading medical experts caution universities that are considering closing**

As university administrators consider their options in responding to the presence of COVID-19 outbreaks on campuses, [consensus is building](#) among experts that closing a university and sending students home may increase the public health risk.

Leading physicians like Mike Saag, M.D., professor of medicine in the University of Alabama at Birmingham Division of Infectious Diseases and a globally respected expert who has been on the front line of COVID-19, agree that it is safer for universities to remain open and make resources available to students.

“There is a strong feeling among public health and infectious disease experts that it is safer to keep students on a college campus where there is COVID-19 spread rather than closing campus and sending students home en masse,” said Saag, who serves as associate dean of Global Health in the UAB School of Medicine.

Saag and UAB Senior Vice President for Medicine and School of Medicine Dean Selwyn Vickers, M.D., members of the University of Alabama System Health and Safety Task Force, say they remain focused on decreasing the rate of transmission and limiting the total number of cases by using risk mitigation strategies outlined in the UA System’s comprehensive plan. These strategies that provide students with the tools they need include mandatory face coverings, isolation/quarantine space, a robust contact tracing/exposure notification protocol and ready access to healthcare services.

“Universities have leveraged medical expertise, resources and technology to implement extensive safety measures and reduce risk on campus, and plans are in place to manage the virus on campus,” Vickers said. “Student behavior and compliance are some of the fundamental components of managing the outbreak.”

In a statement released today and endorsed by the UA System Task Force, Dr. Saag warned of the hazards of sending students home. “The risk in closing a college campus and forcing thousands of students home at once is that the virus then has the opportunity to spread more widely to other geographic locations and possibly more vulnerable populations,” Saag said.

“From a public health perspective, you want to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus,” Vickers said. “If resources are available on campus to manage an outbreak and keep it from spreading to other locations and people that may not be experiencing spread, that should be the goal.”

University of Alabama System Chancellor Finis St. John appointed the UA System Health and Safety Task Force in April and charged the group with using every resource available in the System for the benefit of students, faculty and staff. In the initial announcement, Chancellor St. John said, “We are fortunate that the scientists, doctors and staff at UAB are on the leading edge of efforts to resolve this health crisis. While it remains uncertain when students, faculty and staff will resume normal activities, no one is better positioned to develop a plan for the health and safety of our campuses than these world-class experts.” The latest System plan is posted here. <https://uasystem.edu/comprehensive-health-and-safety-plan-summary-of-plan-revisions>.