SLHS Works with Colleges on Reopening Plan

[Canton-Potsdam Hospital Family Practitioner Thivisa Rajagopal, MD, explains the proper way to wear a mask; do not twist the straps, and make sure the nose and mouth are covered. (Her video on proper usage may be viewed at https://www.facebook.com/StLawrenceHealthSystem.)]

POTSDAM, NY – Providers at St. Lawrence Health System’s Canton-Potsdam Hospital (CPH) have been working in tandem with area college and university leaders to assure health and safety protocols are in place as students return for the fall semester.

CPH Associate Chief Medical Officer Andrew Williams, MD, FACP, also serves as the St. Lawrence County Board of Health Chairman, and in both roles he has been meeting with university presidents, senior staff members, and health center providers on a weekly basis for several weeks to create a comprehensive plan to safely reopen.

“There has been ongoing collaboration and coordination with St. Lawrence Health System and the St. Lawrence County Department of Health/Board of Health all summer to create the best possible plan, which includes enforcement efforts, and an option to transition to fully online learning if conditions warrant such a move,” he said.

“I have been working with them to coordinate their planning efforts, and advise them on decisions concerning compliance with New York State guidelines and best practices,” Dr. Williams added. “I’ve also provided consultation on appropriate testing strategies and coordinating the implementation of these plans.”

Clarkson University and St. Lawrence University will have their own testing programs on campus, and St. Lawrence Health System will be coordinating the collection of the samples through its health centers on both campuses. SUNY Potsdam and SUNY Canton are conducting testing through SUNY Upstate, and the Health System will provide follow-up testing as needed.
Each university has plans in place to test all students for COVID-19 upon their arrival and continue testing on a weekly, random basis throughout the semester. Additional testing for students with symptoms, as well as a system of contact tracing, has been organized by each school in cooperation with the county Public Health Department. Clarkson and St. Lawrence have reported all of their international students, or those from New York’s travel advisory list, will be quarantined for two weeks.

“The colleges are implementing a robust, advanced testing plan to minimize the chance of an infected student starting school, as well as a surveillance program that will rapidly detect an outbreak,” Dr. Williams said. “They are following the Center for Disease Control and New York State guidance, and going beyond what is required to protect their students, faculty, staff, and the community.”

“St. Lawrence Heath System (SLHS) has been on the front lines of the North Country’s pandemic response, caring for many of the area’s COVID-19 patients, and proactively conducting surveillance to test on our target groups,” stated SLHS President and Chief Executive Officer David B. Acker. “We feel it is our responsibility to help our communities stay healthy and safe. That includes assisting organizations of all types, including schools and universities, with the tools and resources they need to reopen safely while easing anxiety and concern.”

“During the height of the pandemic, members of our Health System’s clinical leadership team and myself, have had many conversations with business and university leaders about our need to assist in welcoming back students and revitalizing the local economy,” he continued.

Infectious Diseases Specialist Daniel Soule, DO, is a member of the CPH team who has been instrumental in preparing the Health System for pandemic planning, procedures, testing, and patient oversight.

CPH Rheumatologist Eyal Kedar, MD, has also been lending his experienced hand to coronavirus measures by serving as one of the physicians on the SLHS inpatient COVID-19 treatment team. He has further helped develop clinical trial opportunities for both hospitalized and outpatient COVID-19 patients within the System.