UC COVID-19 Newsletter: January 2021

While UC campuses, health centers and labs played a major role in confronting the COVID-19 pandemic that marked 2020—you can take a look at where we started and how far we’ve come—before jumping into the University’s January COVID-19 update, we want to make sure you saw a statement from UC President Michael V. Drake, M.D. regarding the failed insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6:

The orderly transfer of power has been a hallmark of our American democracy for more than two centuries. The shocking display of lawless violence in the nation’s capital on January 6 was an horrific, and ultimately tragic, affront to our national dignity. The University of California cherishes the free speech right of the people “peaceably to assemble” to share their grievances. But that is not what occurred in Washington, D.C., yesterday. We must stand together — regardless of political party or point of view — to condemn the violence on Wednesday and to uphold, protect and defend our bedrock values.

Student and Campus Life
UC is committed to ensuring continuity and providing resources for its campus and lab communities.

- On Jan. 11, UC announced that it is planning for a return to primarily in-person instruction systemwide starting fall 2021, enabling prospective and current students, as well as their families, to understand the goal well in advance amid the uncertainties of the pandemic.
- With the pandemic causing a sharp economic downturn, the UCLA Foundation felt it was especially important to act and do even more to make sure that a UCLA education remains accessible: The foundation has given $5 million for student financial aid with the funds being allocated to scholarships and COVID-19 emergency support.
- UC Riverside resident advisors are creating ways to remain virtually connected while building a sense of community with first-year students in campus housing.
- Prompted by the temporary suspension of in-person tours due to COVID-19, UC Santa Cruz is offering virtual tours of Younger Lagoon Natural Reserve both in English and Spanish.

Preparedness and Response
Critical operations continue at all UC campus and system locations, and our health centers continue to provide vital services to their communities.

- A mutual aid effort launched at UC Berkeley has grown to become the Common Humanity Collective, an operation of volunteers delivering hand sanitizers and masks to communities, including farmworkers in Central Valley, hurricane victims in Louisiana and the Navajo Nation in Arizona and Utah.
- Unidos En Salud, a volunteer-led coalition between UC San Francisco, Latino Task Force, Chan Zuckerberg Biohub and San Francisco Department of Public Health, is providing testing and public health information for the Latinx community.
• With the addition of UC Santa Barbara’s new Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA)-certified lab, the COVID surveillance testing team is running around 4,000 COVID-19 tests per week.
• Scientists are using mathematical models and computational simulations enabled by Los Alamos National Laboratory’s supercomputing capabilities to understand how best to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine to minimize impacts on the health care system and the overall population.

Research
UC researchers continue to advance understanding and develop new tools to address and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are highlights of some of the efforts taking place.

• With the support of a grant from the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), UC Irvine researchers are working to develop a preemptive vaccine for all coronaviruses.
• Research into additional coronavirus vaccines continues across the country, including at UC Davis Health: The health system recently launched a Phase 3 clinical trial with the NIH and Novavax to test another experimental vaccine to help address the global pandemic.
• UC Merced Professor Jennifer Hahn-Holbrook and incoming graduate student Jessica Marino have a new study suggesting that the breastmilk of mothers who have recovered from COVID-19 contains strong antibodies to the virus.
• New simulations done on supercomputers—including on the San Diego Supercomputer Center’s ‘Comet’ system at UC San Diego—may help researchers understand how new inhibitors react and potentially help to develop a new generation of drugs to target viruses.
• Using crystallography performed at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory’s Advanced Light Source, a team of biologists determined the atomic structure of a coronavirus protein thought to help the pathogen evade and dampen response from human immune cells.

If you have any questions about this update or other issues, please contact Chris Harrington with UC’s Office of Federal Governmental Relations.