

Inconsistencies in Quarantine Process Leave Alma College Students Frustrated

Quarantine is a reality for many college students this semester, with colleges attempting to manage rising COVID cases. Here at Alma College, descriptions of quarantine life are beginning to show inconsistencies between policy and execution, leading to a growing sense of discontent from affected students.

Alma College's policies for quarantine were developed through the Health Department, who is responsible for contact tracing and deciding which students are moved into quarantine, according to Residence Life. Anne Lambrecht, Director of Counselling, Health and Wellness said that after those students are identified, "Quarantine space and options are discussed, and many students find they can travel home and quarantine safely at home. Campus options are also discussed to limit contact with others and to limit bathroom sharing with the fewest people possible."

When Student B was asked to quarantine, though, they say that things went differently, "I was forced into a quarantine dorm. My roommate was not asked to quarantine at all." Roommates of students who were allowed to quarantine in place, however, were required to quarantine too. Student D said, "I live in an apartment, so they essentially 'shut the door' and we quarantined in there." Another student interviewed, C, said, "The process was different for me because I had my own room so when I got the call I went in my room."

According to Lambrecht, quarantining is determined by CDC definitions of close contact, but also required of students "with potential risk for close contact". By these standards, Student B's roommate should have been placed in quarantine as well. Student E, who lives in a small house on campus, was asked to isolate while awaiting test results from a possible positive case, but their roommate and other housemates were not contacted.

Inconsistencies in the implementation of quarantine policies are concerning. The Health Department is responsible for contact tracing on campus, according to Lambrecht, who said "Contact tracing is conducted by interviewing the positive case and any additional information that contacts provide that is passed along to the health department."

While contact tracing has been successful at identifying those at risk through events and close contact, it seems to be falling short in consideration of the people living with those who were chosen for quarantine. Student E felt uncomfortable being isolated while their housemates were unaffected because they felt like they should all be isolating, but did not want to cause tension by asking.

"The quarantine is being handled atrociously. We have been told, even though we're negative and the person suspected of being positive also turned out to be negative the whole time, we are still required to remain here anyway," Student B expressed their frustration when asked how they felt the quarantine was being handled by the school. Student E, however, was

allowed to stop isolating after the person she came into contact with tested negative. Their experiences show again the inconsistencies in implementing quarantine policy.

When asked about the decision to continue to quarantine students once tests come back negative, Lambrecht said, “A negative test according to the health department does not change quarantine guidance. This is due to the fact that they are at risk of becoming sick. The 14-day guidance is to separate people who may spread the illness.”

The factors that decide who is at risk are open to interpretation, leaving gaps that put the community in danger and causing increasing concern from students who are all aware that they are at risk of being quarantined anytime.

“It's changed how I look at like going outside in general, I think I am more cautious and afraid of the pandemic knowing how much it sucks to be in quarantine,” Student B said, “I'm trying my very best to not be in that situation again.”