
College travel affected by virus

ECSU students studying abroad coming home

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STORRS/WILLIMANTIC — As the coronavirus outbreak worsens internationally, Eastern Connecticut State University was recently directed to suspend or cancel programs in the countries of concern.

The University of Connecticut, meanwhile, continues to closely monitor the situation.

UConn spokesperson Stephanie Reitz said a study-abroad trip to Hong Kong was canceled in December in relation to the outbreak, noting those students would have studied abroad in the spring.

No study-abroad programs in Italy had been canceled as of today.

A UConn study-abroad trip to Hong Kong was canceled in December in relation to the outbreak.

ECSU Director of University Relations Ed Osborn said the 17 colleges and universities in the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System, including Eastern, were directed Wednesday to immediately suspend or cancel institutionally sponsored travel to countries of concern.

That includes China, South Korea, Iran, Italy and Japan, a list that is expected to grow in the coming weeks and months, the notice said.

“We work with an organization called CIS Abroad, which is a third party that basically arranges all the travel,” Osborn said. “They have been on top of this situation in the last month and a half as classes got back in session here and elsewhere.”

He said there are four students in Italy who have been informed they need to make arrangements to come home.

Osborn said two students who were planning to study in Japan and two students who were planning to study in South Korea had not left the U.S. yet, but were notified of the directive.

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The coronavirus outbreak, which was first detected in Wuhan, China, in December, is believed to have been caused by animals sold at an open-air market in Wuhan.

The World Health Organization's International Health Regulations Emergency Committee declared Jan. 30 the outbreak is a public health emergency of international concern.

Coronaviruses are part of a large family of viruses common in many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats and bats.

The viruses usually cause mild to moderate respiratory illnesses.

Symptoms of the virus include runny nose, headaches, cough, sore throat, fever and a general feeling of being unwell.

On Tuesday, the state Department of Public Health issued an alert to all kindergarten through 12th grade schools and local health departments about the outbreak.

"Although we have no confirmed cases of coronavirus in Connecticut, we must be prepared for any situation and that is why are continuing to take all necessary precautions to protect Connecticut

More information about coronavirus is available on the state Department of Public Health website, ct.gov/coronavirus.

from this dangerous virus," Gov. Ned Lamont said in a press release Wednesday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said symptoms of the virus may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure.

According to a New York Times story published today, more than 83,000 people in at least 53 countries have been infected with coronavirus.

UConn officials are in regular communication with 88 students studying abroad in Italy, where the number of coronavirus cases recently climbed to 400.

UConn said in a statement issued Wednesday the university has been monitoring the situation and all 88 of those students are safe and healthy.

The two colleges where UConn students are studying in Italy, ISI Florence and the Umbra Institute in Perugia, were still open as of today and planned to continue coursework after mid-term breaks ended.

"With that being said, of course, the situation is fluid and could change," the statement said. UConn has confirmed with the two colleges in Italy, if the campuses are closed, students will be able to complete their coursework remotely or online.

UConn spokesperson Stephanie Reitz said, if students want to return from Italy, they have the option to complete their coursework online and remotely.

"We're still discussing the issue every day as we watch the news develop," she said.

UConn has advised students not to travel to affected areas, such as the Lombardy and Veneto regions of northern Italy.

"We also are advising them to closely follow the rules and guidelines of their host program when deciding whether to travel out of Italy on trips, given other countries' decisions on border restrictions," the statement said.

UConn officials advised the students in Italy to review the U.S. Department of State

and CDC websites.

"A lot of false information and rumors are circulating now, so we encourage you to consider all news sources critically," a notification sent to the students said.

Reitz said she didn't know of anyone in Japan and there is one person in South Korea who is returning home, though she didn't know if the person is a faculty member or student.

"We have nothing that indicates that person was exposed either, but as an abundance of caution, we're making sure any of those potentially risky areas are being watched," she said, referring to the person who was in South Korea.

Reitz said the last of the UConn community members in China ended their "watch period" in mid-February, a monitoring period.

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