

Big Ten Announces Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases



The Big Ten Conference formally announced its first Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases.

The task force was initially formed on March 7 at the request of Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren. It consists of a representative from each Big Ten institution appointed by the Big Ten Council of Presidents/Chancellors.

The purpose of the task force is to provide counsel and sound medical advice to ensure the health, safety and wellness of the Big Ten's students, coaches, administrators and fans.

Members of the task force come from a variety of backgrounds, representing a diverse set of disciplines across campus healthcare systems and schools of public health. According to the Big Ten's press release, the input of the members will serve as a resource for the Big Ten to make important decisions based on information received from local, state and federal health departments, along with the NCAA.

"These are unprecedented times in our world and the focus of any conversation taking place in college athletics right now is the health, safety and welfare of students and the public," Warren said. "We are truly blessed to have a collection of world-class research institutions with the resources and talented medical experts on campus that allowed us to quickly assemble this task force to address a global pandemic.

"We are thankful to have the Task Force in place moving forward to allow the Big Ten Conference to position itself at the forefront of this issue and to share best practices for the management of and response to emerging infectious diseases now and in the future."

The group is chaired by Dr. Chris Kratochvil, who is the Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical Research and Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), as well as the Executive Director of the Global Center for Health Security at UNMC and Nebraska Medicine. The UNMC, which played a key role in the treatment of the Ebola virus in 2014, is home to the National Quarantine Center, the nation's only federal quarantine unit, and is also the location of the National Biocontainment Training Center.

"The Task Force leverages extraordinary expertise from across the Big Ten, tackling COVID-19 related issues important to student-athletes and athletic programs," Dr. Kratochvil said. "Strong participation by all of the Big Ten universities has provided for a robust and synergistic team. The group serves as a

resource to the entire Conference, addressing current infectious disease concerns, while preparing the Big Ten for the safe resumption of athletic activities in the future.”

They have been busy working via weekly conference calls to assist the Big Ten and its member institutions with the best practices at the moment, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and long term.

The input of the task force was critical during Big Ten discussions regarding the cancellation of winter and spring sports competition for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year. According to the release, they will provide important leadership when discussing return-to-campus decisions at the appropriate time.

The membership of the Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases is listed below:

SCHOOL	NAME	TITLE
Illinois	Dr. Robert Parker	Director of the McKinley Health Center
Indiana	Dr. Larry Rink	Clinical Professor of Medicine and Team Physician
Iowa	Dr. Edith Parker	Dean, College of Public Health
Maryland	Dr. Boris Lushniak	Dean, School of Public Health
Michigan	Dr. Preeti Malani	Chief Health Officer
Michigan State	Dr. David Weismantel	University Physician
Minnesota	Dr. Brad Nelson	Medical Director and Team Physician, Dept. of Athletics
Nebraska	Dr. Chris Kratochvil	Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical Research
Northwestern	Luke Figora	Chief Risk and Compliance Officer
Ohio State	Dr. Susan Koletar	Director, Division of Infectious Diseases
Penn State	Dr. Roberta Millard	Assistant Professor and Team Physician
Purdue	Dr. Gail Walenga	Director, Student Health Center
Rutgers	Dr. Vicente Gracias	Sr. Vice Chancellor for Clinical Affairs, Chief Academic Officer RWJBH
Wisconsin	Dr. Ann Sheehy	Assoc. Professor & Clinician, School of Medicine & Public Health

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