





CLEAN AIR AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SAFETY POLICIES AT CAMPUS-BASED RESIDENCE HALLS

by David Vinson, PhD

Because Covid-19 is an airborne contagion, we have been compelled to think more carefully than ever about the air we breathe and how best to remove airborne pathogens that threaten us. No longer can we enjoy a meal inside a restaurant without concern for our own health, and the same applies to shopping, using public transportation, as well as so many other routine activities we once took for granted.

Of course, the threat posed by the virus is also felt keenly on our college campuses, not least of all because a campus cannot thrive without its students. An empty campus is such a sad sight, and it is one many of us witnessed first-hand this past spring as we shifted to remote learning. Our goal ever since has been to strike a balance between keeping our students safe and healthy while also sustaining—as much as possible—a thriving campus life. We have rallied and worked diligently to find solutions. We have invested in touchless technologies, revised our cleaning procedures, established capacity limits, reconsidered safety protocols from top to bottom. We are always learning, and there is more work still to do.

One major challenge concerns health and safety in residence halls, where students not only sleep but also eat, socialize, relax, and study. Residence halls are our students' home away from home, after all. With this in mind, the need for quality air in residence halls is an imperative, a vital component in mitigating the spread of the virus. Moreover, new policies

have been established in residence halls, all of which serve the purpose of creating a safe but also enjoyable living experience for residents.

Energy Recovery Units and Clean Air

The Centers for Control and Disease Prevention (CDC) has acknowledged that coronavirus can spread through particles in the air and sometimes travel beyond distances of six feet, even lingering throughout a room for up to 30 minutes. Transmissions are most likely to occur in enclosed spaces with inadequate ventilation. What this means is traditional HVAC systems that recirculate contaminated air in public buildings and homes must come to an end—this was never an optimal health situation, and now it has the potential to be deadly. The same logic applies to residence halls, in which the production of quality air is hardly a luxury but rather a requirement for the well-being of our students. The sooner we invest in systems that produce quality air, the sooner we can return to something resembling life prior to the pandemic.

Broadly, the purpose of energy recovery technology is to remove contaminants, and also to heat and cool the air by routinely exhausting the contaminated air and taking in, cleaning, and then distributing fresh outside air. To offer a more technical explanation, it is during the warmer seasons that the system pre-cools and dehumidifies the incoming ventilation air, which it manages by sending the rejected heat into the exhaust airstream to cool the condenser coil at a lower temperature. During cooler seasons, the system uses the heat from the exhaust airstream to pre-heat and humidify the incoming ventilation air.

Energy recovery units come in a variety of sizes and technologies. Some of the most common energy recovery technologies use either rotary wheels, flat plate exchangers, or heat pipes. With rotary wheels, air-to-air energy recovery wheels rotate, draw in heat energy, and release it into the colder airstream. Flat plate exchangers consist of alternating layers of plates that are separated and sealed with a heat or energy recovery core which treats

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incoming air. Flat plate exchangers are generally offered in three substrate material options—aluminum, polypropylene, or heat and moisture. Regarding heat pipe technologies, these are air-to-air heat exchangers consisting of metal tubes charged with a refrigerant. Heat pipe technology offers one of the most robust solutions for difficult applications where high temperatures are encountered, low Exhaust Air Transfer Ratio (EATR) is required, or corrosive and contaminated air may be present.

Energy recovery technology is the most renewable and environmentally friendly of all HVAC systems. Not only does it improve air quality, but it reduces heating and cooling energy costs by recycling energy. Energy recovery systems are ideal for moisture control as well, since they transfer moisture from humid outdoor air to the exhaust mainstream, or they add moisture to the incoming ventilation air. The systems are likewise compliant with the ventilation and energy standards set by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

Tips for Improving Ventilation at Residence Halls

Campus-based residence halls can house hundreds of residents at a time, and increasing outdoor air ventilation can go a long way towards mitigating the spread of coronavirus. When

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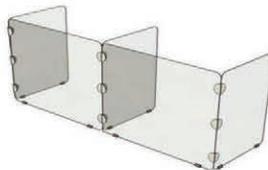
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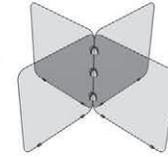
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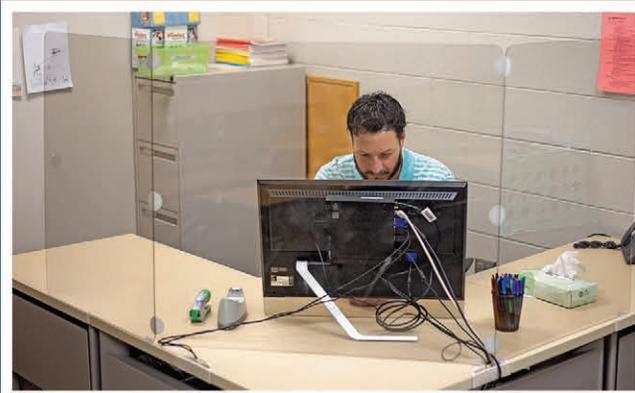
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At Emory University, students who live on campus but who are Covid-19 positive are required to remain in housing provided by Emory for a minimum of 14 days. Impacted students have zero public contact unless instructed to be seen for a medical appointment, and they will receive meals delivered to their doors, in addition to linen services and daily telemedical check-ins with a representative from Emory Student Health Services.

weather conditions allow, encourage the opening of windows—unless, of course, doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling; triggering asthma symptoms). Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and position them securely and carefully in or near windows so as not to create potentially contaminated airflow directly from one person to another. Moreover, the fan position should not create potentially contaminated airflow to

people outside of the room (e.g., pedestrians using walkways within reach of the window). Strategic window fan placement in exhaust mode can help draw fresh air into a room via other open windows and without generating strong room air currents.

Another means of improving ventilation is to disable ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on occupancy or temperature during specific hours. Also, with air fan/

filtration systems, one may consider using ultra-violet germicidal irradiation as a supplement to help inactivate the virus that causes Covid-19, especially if options for increasing room ventilation are limited.

New Safety Policies at Residence Halls

The vast majority of private universities and colleges across the country have implemented new policies at campus-based residence halls. The most common policy is that all residents are required to wear a mask upon entering the residence hall, although masks may be removed when residents enter their room. Many of the new policies are congruent with safety measures adopted elsewhere on campus—for instance, the installation of hand sanitizing stations in central, highly trafficked spaces such as a resident hall lobby or in hallways.

Other policies include providing capacity signage for elevators, stairways, shared bathrooms, and other common spaces, particularly those where residents may wish to

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congregate and socialize. Similarly, at designated common spaces, occupancy may be limited; where applicable, furniture may be reduced and also placed 6 to 10 feet apart. All residents are likely to be required to wear masks in common spaces, as well.

The pandemic has inspired the need to rethink visitation policies, as well. A standard practice has been to allow residents to visit each other but to disallow students who do not live on campus. This helps to eliminate possible contagion, which is particularly imperative in populated and enclosed living spaces. Room changes have been temporarily suspended, since doing so helps to maintain the health and safety of residents. Even the management of fire drills have been reevaluated, in which students may be required to wear face masks during the drills, in addition to keeping a minimum of 6 feet apart.

At Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia), students who live on campus but who are Covid-19 positive, whether they are symptomatic or not, are required to remain in

housing provided by Emory for a minimum of 14 days. Impacted students have zero public contact unless instructed to be seen for a medical appointment, and they will receive meals delivered to their doors, in addition to linen services and daily telemedical check-ins with a representative from Emory Student Health Services. The amount of time spent in isolation will be dependent on the length of illness, presence of symptoms, and Student Health Services guidance.

Emory's thorough and thoughtful approach to treating residents who test positive for the virus is one that numerous other private institutions have adopted, and it is surely an exemplary model.

Persistence, No Matter the Odds

Our campuses are often self-contained, designed to function like miniature cities where everything a student might need is within walking distance. We want our students to spend time on campus outside of class, to take full advantage of all that our campuses offer.

We also want our students to thrive socially, to make meaningful connections that carry on well beyond graduation.

Yes, the pandemic has thoroughly disrupted campus life—but it has not defeated our spirit.

The ingenuity and cooperation of our campus communities have allowed us to persist despite the odds. Each day we learn something new about how to navigate the realities brought on by the pandemic, and we continue to work towards minimizing health risks and making our campuses as safe as possible.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: PUPN staff writer

Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English

with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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