

# A&M prepares for students' return



Meredith Seaver — THE BATTALION

A free oral COVID-19 testing option offered by Curative Inc. through the Texas A&M University System is self-administered and located in a tent next to the Beutel Health Center in Lot 27. Students, faculty and staff can register for this testing option at [tx.ag/COVIDtest](https://tx.ag/COVIDtest).

## Texas A&M offering two options for those looking to be tested for COVID-19 on campus

By **Rebecca Morris and Brady Stone**  
@RebeccaSheWrote & @bradystonex

Since the pandemic began, Texas A&M has seen a plethora of changes regarding COVID-19 testing.

Director of Student Health Services (SHS) Dr. Martha Dannenbaum said the department is currently offering two different testing options — a free oral swab by Curative Inc. and a self-referral nasal test through Beutel covered by the CARES Act amendment to the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA). Both tests are self-administered.

The CARES Act adapted the FFCRA, requiring that all insurance companies cover COVID-19 testing fees and waive cost-sharing to allow for the affordable testing of all individuals, regardless of ability to pay. This means all testing, including that on campus, is free of charge as long as an individual's insurance covers self-administered tests.

Students, faculty and staff with or without symptoms can sign up to visit the Curative Inc. testing tent in Lot 27 next to Beutel at [tamus.curativeinc.com](https://tamus.curativeinc.com), where they can choose a time slot to get tested. The tent has the capacity to perform hundreds of approximately three-minute oral tests per day, providing students their results in 48-72 hours.

"I think many people are concerned there's probably not going to be availability or it's going to be super crowded or they won't be able to get in," Dannenbaum said. "The availability of testing across the community has improved significantly in the last three months. Because it's a scheduled system, it actually moves very quickly, especially in the tent."

The self-referral nasal test option requires a trip inside Beutel, where an individual will be screened for symptoms, then led to a testing room where they are supervised as they perform the nasal swab. Students can expect their results from this test within 48-72 hours, as well.

Before the CARES Act was passed and testing became readily available, SHS offered limited antibody testing for \$100 at Beutel for asymptomatic individuals. At the time, naso-pharyngeal swabbing was offered through the Respiratory Clinic for those who had a suspected case of the coronavirus.

In May, industrial distribution junior Cherie Anderson was tested on campus after experiencing swollen tonsils, fatigue and headaches.

**"Everyone was so nice and they were really helpful discussing my options."**

Cherie Anderson,  
Industrial distribution junior

"It was really good, the precautions and everything they were taking," Anderson said. "When I was in the waiting room, or in my room where I was getting tested, they had scrubs and they were putting them on and

taking them off every time and throwing them away. Everyone was so nice and they were really helpful discussing my options."

In the spring, the only testing available at Beutel for symptomatic cases was the naso-pharyngeal swabbing, which collects from deep inside the nose. These tests were originally charged to a person's insurance or student account, but the Health Center is looking to give money back to those who paid out-of-pocket back early spring.

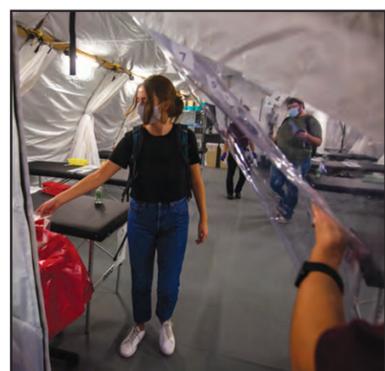
"They were still saying, 'No, you still have to do the naso-pharyngeal or NP collection,' and that's the one that's very uncomfortable for most people. We are not doing that testing anymore, since the CDC has said we don't need to, so that's a win for sure," Dannenbaum said. "We were first getting the insurance paying 100 percent in April when the federal mandate was done so we're trying to help the students that may have had to pay out of pocket before we had the option to file insurance for them."

International studies senior Areala Mendoza got tested in early August using the free oral swabs before her roommates moved in.

"I wanted to get tested because I had gone on an out-of-state trip with my family and I knew I wanted to come back to College Station," Mendoza said. "I knew A&M had free tests, so in order to get that I had to come here and keep myself quarantined in my room while I waited for the results to happen."

However, when Mendoza went to schedule her test, the scheduling website was down for the free Curative Inc. test. This type of testing is not affiliated with the A.P. Beutel Health Center, so when Mendoza called Beutel to try and get a time slot, she accidentally

TESTING ON PG. 6



Photos by Meredith Seaver — THE BATTALION

To register for the self-administered nasal swab test that can be filed with insurance, visit Student Health Services or call Beutel Health Center to schedule an appointment.



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# Letter from the editor: Undeterred

The Battalion will strive to meet readers where they are with easily accessible content



Brady Stone  
@bradystonex

As the first day of class quickly approaches, one word can best describe the semester to come: unknown.

Since early March when in-person classes were canceled for the semester, students have been met with unprecedented challenges that seem to arise daily.

Not only are students now tasked with navigating college life in the middle of a century-defining pandemic, but they must do so amid a devastating economic downturn and while social isolating. With changes to campus life as a result of COVID-19, it is clear that many of the long-standing traditions of Aggieland will have to adapt as well.

Already, Aggie Muster and Fish Camp were held online for the first time in history, spring and summer graduation ceremonies morphed into livestreams and Texas A&M Athletics has been at a standstill for five months.

This fall, Kyle Field may not host a 30,000-plus student section that will Saw 'Em Off before,

during and after every home football game. Students needing a pinch of luck before an exam may not have the option to stop by Academic Plaza to place a penny at Sully's feet.

But some traditions will remain the same.

Students can still greet each other with Aggieland's official greeting: Howdy.

Gig 'em will still communicate the camaraderie and togetherness it always has.

And the 12th Man can continue to stand for the duration of football games, though maybe not from inside Kyle Field.

But most importantly, The Battalion will be undeterred. We will remain steady in our mission as the independent student voice of A&M. This semester, The Battalion will continue to produce weekly print editions and daily digital content covering a broad range of campus news, culture and events.

Readers can expect up-to-date coverage of COVID-19 on campus with a focus on testing updates and vaccine developments from our reporting desks.

The Battalion's sports desk will travel uncharted waters as A&M

and the SEC attempt to salvage what is left of the fall sports season.

The Battalion's opinion desk will continue to give commentary on issues that affect students with thoughtful construction and interesting perspectives.

The Battalion's creative media desks will be working to produce eye-catching and inventive photos, videos and designs.

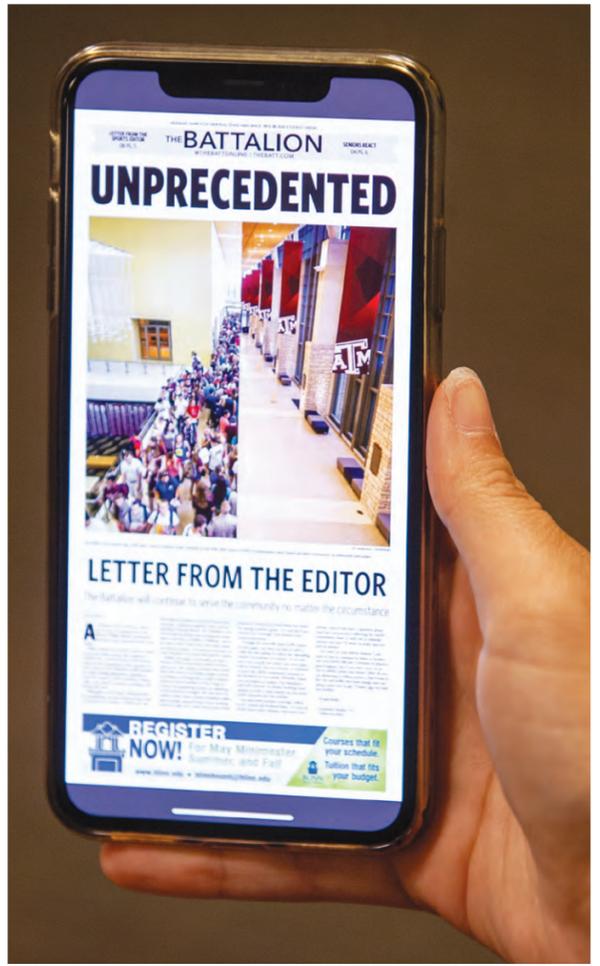
And most importantly, The Battalion will prioritize meeting our readers where they are — on campus or at home.

Using a digital-first production method, we will distribute every story on our website and social media with accessibility at the forefront.

Online versions of our print editions will be available on [issuu.com/thebatt](http://issuu.com/thebatt), video content can be found on The Battalion's YouTube channel and a new podcast in development will be released within the first week of class.

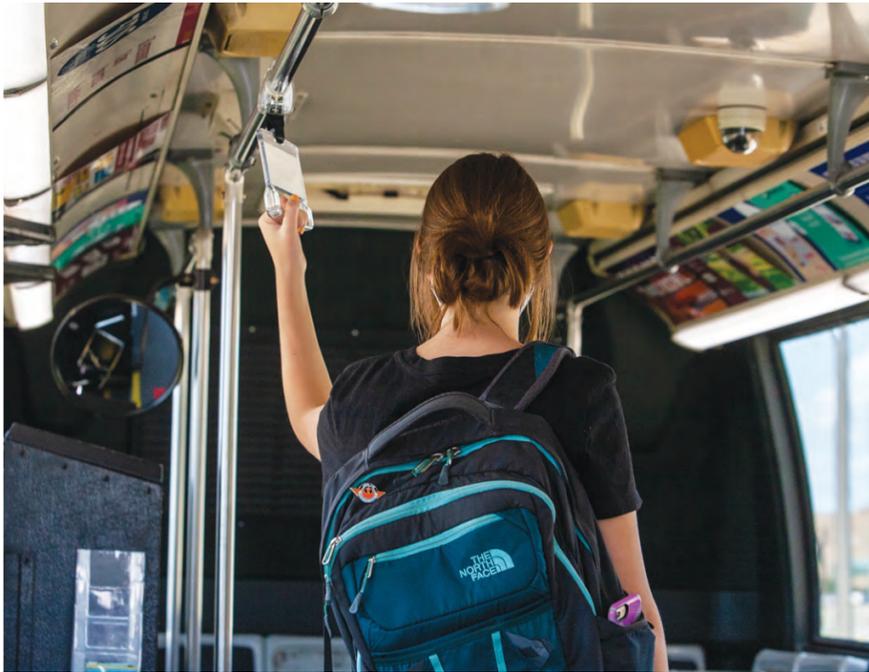
So wherever you may be, read The Battalion, support our journalism, wear your mask and stay healthy.

Brady Stone is a journalism junior and editor-in-chief for The Battalion.



Meredith Seaver — THE BATTALION

The Battalion's digital-first practices will continue to provide easy access to readers everywhere.



Meredith Seaver — THE BATTALION

Aggie Spirit bus drivers will wipe down high-touch areas during the day as one of the many new precautions implemented by Transportation Services.

# Transportation Services adapts to COVID-19

Texas A&M introduces new cleaning procedures to ensure safety on buses

By Julia Potts  
@juliaapotts

While many organizations on campus are adapting to health concerns over the coronavirus, Transportation Services at Texas A&M has taken extra precautions to make sure passengers have a safe and healthy ride.

Transportation Services recently updated its website with new transit and parking information relating to COVID-19. Passengers will be required to wear a mask on the bus and will continue to enter through the front door and exit through the rear door. The maximum capacity for buses will be 50-60 passengers and any bus that reaches or exceeds that number will bypass stops until it drops below capacity.

Brent Kelm, assistant manager for Trans-

portation Services, said there is a cleaning routine in place for the buses to help prevent the spread of the virus.

"Once a week, on Sundays or Saturdays, buses are fogged with a product called Vital Oxide, which persists for about seven days on hard surfaces," Kelm said. "That's going to touch every surface on the bus. The drivers throughout the day will also use Vital Oxide Wipes."

Communication senior Katherine Garcia, an Aggie Spirit bus driver, said the drivers use the wipes to clean the rails and other frequently used surfaces on the bus.

"During the time allowed we'll go ahead and clean high-touch areas around the unit, including seats," Garcia said. "We'll also clean the driver's area whenever we finish our shift and pass it along to the following driver."

Kelm said using the wipes is necessary because the effects of the weekly fogging can

wear off in heat and after frequent touching, and will help with the increase in riders. Kelm said all the same transportation services will still be running full service throughout the fall semester, with an expected increase in the number of buses en route to compensate for the decreased passenger capacity.

"So on a typical day throughout the semester, on average, we'll provide about 55,000 rides a day," Kelm said. "That's not necessarily 55,000 different people, it could be the same person to and from campus, back home or it could be the same person four times. Once campus and everything went online, we had between 600 and 800 rides a day, so we saw a dramatic decrease in the number of people riding the buses."

Diana Vasquez, an Aggie Spirit bus driver since 2018, said if the number of passengers does increase, then it may become difficult for the drivers to do the additional cleaning

required by Transportation Services.

"I don't think [cleaning] should impede too much, just because we do have designated times to be in our main campus stops, waiting for passengers to load," Vasquez said. "[What] I could foresee happening is if traffic picks back up and we don't have much time to stay at our stops, then it could be a problem. We try to stay on schedule as much as possible."

Garcia said as a student, the amount of cleaning that is required is very assuring.

"It actually makes me feel more comfortable doing that, because as well as being a driver and a dispatcher that also works in the office, I'm also a student at the end of the day," Garcia said. "I can definitely understand the student perspective and it makes me feel comfortable giving them that opportunity and that feeling knowing that we do take our jobs seriously and we do wipe down the areas and disinfect the areas for everyone's safety."

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Kaylee Cogbill — THE BATTALION

One of the precautions set in place by the Department of Residence Life is mandatory masks everywhere except the student's dorm room.

# On-campus living undergoes changes

A&M ResLife braces for influx of COVID-19 cases among residents

By **Rebecca Morris**  
@RebeccaSheWrote

As the Department of Residence Life wraps up the final days of dorm and apartment move-in, Aggies are learning to adjust to campus life in the midst of a pandemic.

In order to protect on-campus residents, ResLife has taken many safety precautions and created new rules and regulations that encourage social distancing and frequent sanitary procedures.

These rules include limited capacity in dorm common areas such as kitchens and TV lounges, required social distancing, wearing masks everywhere except for the student's room, self monitoring for symptoms, allowing only one guest per resident at a time and no overnight visitors, said ResLife Director of Administrative and Support Services Carol Binzer, Ph.D.

"These rules were created with lots of research and lots of consultation," Binzer said.

"In fact, campuses around the nation have been looking to us because we're one of the larger housing operations. Everybody is doing the best they can with the information they have."

In addition to these rules, Binzer said ResLife has a cohesive plan in the event of an outbreak in the dorms.

"When a student gets sick, they and any roommates would have to isolate themselves," Binzer said. "If their hall has a shared bathroom, the sick residents will be moved to specially designated COVID-19 isolation rooms with personal bathrooms. These rooms are located in all areas of campus so residents would not have to move far from their old dorm and support networks."

While students who test positive will be able to get food delivered to them using their meal plans via the ResLife case management team. This team helps provide necessities for sick residents until they recover from the virus.

If an outbreak occurs within a dorm, that building may be converted into a quarantine facility, depending on the size and severity of the outbreak, as well as the building's layout

and location. The campus and county health departments will also be involved in responding to any outbreaks on campus, Binzer said.

"We have some spaces set aside and should it surge beyond that, I know we have explored some off-campus opportunities to house people," Binzer said. "We have spun a bunch of different scenarios and are trying to figure out what's going on and how best to respond to stem the tide of the contagion."

With all these new rules, the ResLife Engagement, Learning, and Support (ELS) unit, formerly known as Academic Support Initiatives, hopes to continue fostering community, academic achievement and personal well-being in the dorms through modified programs this semester, said ELS manager Sara McCoy.

"The Department of Residence Life is working extensively to ensure the safety and security of our students while still honoring our commitment to community development," McCoy said. "Residence Life staff will be checking in with students more using electronic means — floor GroupMes, text messages, emails, Zoom hangouts — to make sure the social components are still there even through physically distancing needs."

ELS graduate assistant Bianca Cerda said students can still take advantage of the Academic Peer Mentoring Program safely via virtual meetings with their residence hall peer mentor.

"Our Academic Peer Mentor Program is still going strong," Cerda said. "They are going through training to prepare to provide virtual office hours, academic check-ups, collaborative programming with RAs and Peer Panels to help students connect to resources and each other as we navigate this challenging time together."

McCoy said dorm safety goes beyond physical health and students should be conscious of their mental health throughout this upcoming year.

"Don't be afraid to reach out for help, no matter what kind of help you might need," McCoy said. "The Residence Life staff is thoroughly trained to either assist you or direct you to where you can find the help you need. Make sure you take at least one hour a day for yourself to do something you enjoy — read a book, go for a walk, watch something not for class— whatever feeds your soul and is truly for you."



**FREE COVID-19 TESTING**  
**FOR STAFF, FACULTY AND STUDENTS**  
**TX.AG/COVIDTEST**

# A new dining experience

Lower capacity enforced at all on-campus food venues

By Myranda Campanella @MCCampanella\_

Texas A&M's University Dining has made several changes to on-campus dining this fall semester in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Fall semester meal plans officially started Aug. 8 in conjunction with the first move-in day of the semester. Since then, University Dining locations have undergone phased openings to accommodate students' return, said Stephanie Denson, Chartwells district marketing manager.

Denson said the University Dining team has been working throughout the summer to change the seating layouts in all dining locations, implement enhanced cleaning measures and create socially distanced queuing options with floor decals spaced six feet apart.

"We've definitely looked at all angles for how we can have adequate social distance queuing so people feel safe while they're in their lines," Denson said. "When possible, we're utilizing specific doors for entrance and specific doors for exit to help the flow of traffic."

Denson said the doors at the entrance of the Sbisa Underground Food Court have been changed to automatic doors to eliminate another object campus members will need to touch. Additionally, Denson said half of the seating at each dining location has been completely removed to comply with Texas' 50 percent maximum capacity requirements for restaurant operations.

In the event a dining location reaches 50 percent capacity, associates will direct campus members to available locations nearby, Denson said. The dining halls will also begin offering to-go meal options on Aug. 16 as an alternative to eating inside the venues.

According to University Dining's guidelines, all associates, campus members and visitors must comply with the university's rules on face coverings and social distancing.

"All guests must adhere to the A&M rule for face coverings when entering dining locations and should only remove once seated at a table consuming food/beverage," the guidelines state. "Plexi Health Shields are placed at all registers to protect both guests and cashiers."

All locations have hand sanitizer, which Denson said students are encouraged to use when they enter and exit dining locations.

In addition to new safety mea-

sures and dining options, Denson said University Dining has created the Retail Swipe option on campus. According to their website, students can now convert one meal swipe on their plan per day to a "retail swipe." The retail swipes can purchase any items up to \$7.50 on the menus at all on-campus dining locations.

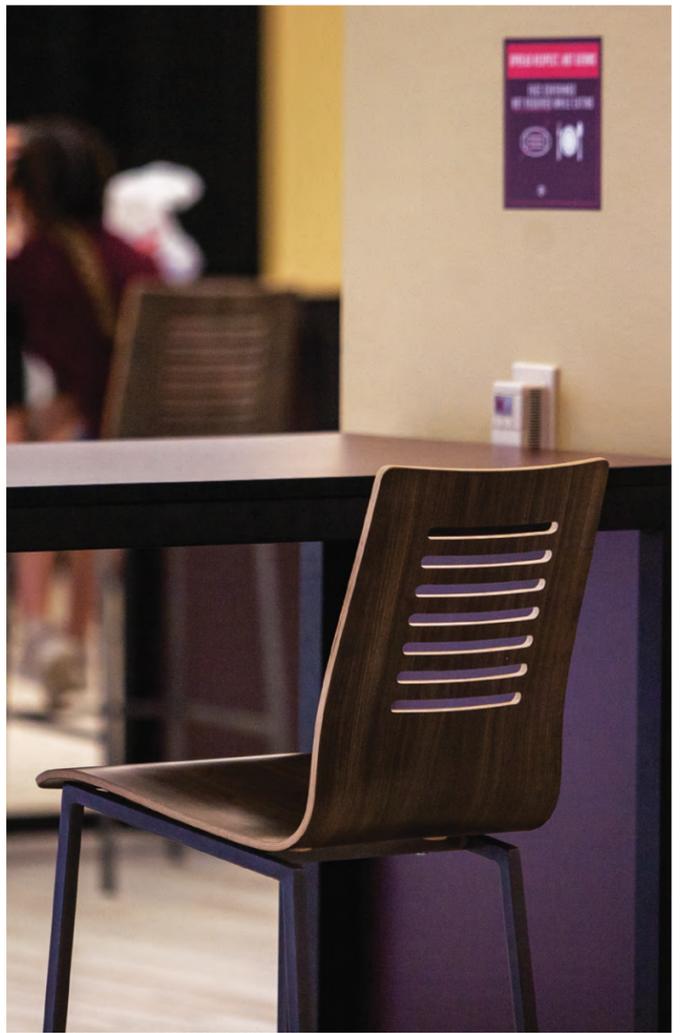
"This feature replaces the Meal Trade program where Meal Swipes were traded for a set combo, side and drink," according to the website. "This allows convenience, customization and variety."

Denson said the decision to change the meal trade options to retail swipes was made before the COVID-19 pandemic in response to feedback University Dining received from campus members.

"Because we have over 65,000 students on campus, we have so many different types of budgets and appetites," Denson said. "We try to find ways to make these meal plans work for different types of students and what they want."

Denson said these new changes were decided with students' best interests in mind in order to keep operating under safe conditions for everyone.

"We're doing everything we can," Denson said. "We'll adjust as needed so we're never stuck in what we're doing."



Photos by Meredith Seaver — THE BATTALION

Distanced floor decals and reduced seating are changes being implemented by University Dining to comply with 50 percent capacity regulations. Dining halls will also introduce to-go meal options on Aug.16 for students who want to avoid dining inside the venues.

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**CHANGE A LIFE**

# Recruiting from home

Organizations adapt to in-person restrictions

By **Julia Potts**  
@juliaapotts

Student organizations at Texas A&M have made major changes to Howdy Week recruitment in order to ensure the safety of current and potential members.

Over the past few months, A&M has put many regulations in place to protect the students, faculty and staff from COVID-19, such as restrictions on gatherings and space reservations. Since many organizations do most of their yearly recruitment during Howdy Week, which is almost at an end, some face difficulty in finding ways to meet potential members.

The Student Government Association and the Traditions Council have been using social media to spread the word about their organizations and promoting the use of online options to attend activities.

Psychology junior Jenna Miller, a member of the Kappa Delta Sorority, said in a normal year, those rushing the sorority would walk around the houses to speak with the other members. However, the coronavirus caused some changes in the recruitment process.

"They're still talking to us, but it's just over Zoom," Miller said. "The first two days that we had, we didn't talk to them in person, they basically sent us all videos."

Miller said she has not seen a decrease in women interested in joining Kappa Delta, though there is some difficulty making connections with them remotely as opposed to face-to-face.

"It's definitely different because, obviously when you're in person, you get to sense people's

body language a lot easier when you're talking to them," Miller said. "You can sense how they're holding themselves a lot better."

Political science senior Rachel Roberts, a member of the Freudian Slip Improvisational Comedy Troupe said this group, which customarily performs monthly shows, finds most of their new members during Howdy Week.

"In the fall, we'll typically do a free Howdy Week show and then do an open house show as well, and auditions are after open house," Roberts said. "So, we'll usually do the majority of our recruitment during that Howdy Week show and during [MSC] Open House."

Roberts said COVID-19 and the regulations from the university have changed the way Freudian Slip can exist as an organization. However, public health senior Sheil Choksi, social media director for Freudian Slip, said they have already made some changes to their plans for the semester, which still allows them to perform virtually.

"Instead of doing improv in front of an audience, we're going to be doing it internet style," Choksi said. "We'll be writing sketches and putting them on YouTube [and] putting them on social media."

Roberts said Freudian Slip is just one of many student groups experiencing difficulty with recruiting, but believes this particular organization will make it through.

"I think every organization at the moment is sort of struggling with how to figure out, 'How can we make sure our members are still active and involved in the organization?'" Roberts said. "For improv, I think we're uniquely suited to adapt to situations."



Kaylee Cogbill — THE BATTALION

Organizations are now working to recruit new members through social media and Zoom now that large events like Howdy Week and MSC Open House have moved online.

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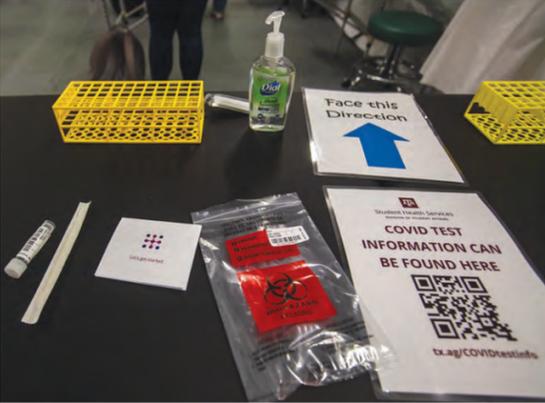
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To prepare for the free, oral swab test, individuals should not eat, drink or smoke for at least 20 minutes before arriving for their testing appointment.

TESTING CONTINUED

signed up for the self-referral nasal swab from Beutel, which could have cost her \$100 because her insurance doesn't cover self-administered tests.

"The patient services were really sweet. They were like, 'I'm sorry for the confusion. We can set you an appointment up in like 15 minutes for the free test,'" Mendoza said. "It was fixed really quickly but there was some confusion on that end."

Dannenbaum said the University System will offer 15,000 free oral tests every month through Curative Inc. to be distributed between A&M System schools in Texas. It is unclear exactly how many of these tests will be allotted to the flagship campus, but Dannenbaum said College Station will have the largest allotment.

Recreation, park and tourism sciences senior Peyton Liebler said the Curative Inc. testing process was simple and fast, giving him peace of mind after visiting family near a COVID-19 hotspot.

"In this whole situation,

we've been seeing how everybody has a part to do with this. Whether it's wearing a mask, socially distanced areas or just respecting people's boundaries with everything, we are seeing how far people are willing to go," Liebler said. "Even if you aren't showing symptoms or think you don't have COVID, it's just nice to come and know instead of constantly wondering and going into a space worrying about spreading it to somebody or worrying about getting it."

With the FFCRA mandating waived fees for COVID-19 testing, SHS will continue to provide diagnostic procedures in various forms throughout the semester. For more information, visit the SHS website.

"The goal is that regardless of your circumstance, your insurance status, your financial status, your faculty, staff or student status, you can access COVID testing with the least amount of barriers possible," Dannenbaum said. "We are open so if people are here now, they are eligible to come get tested."

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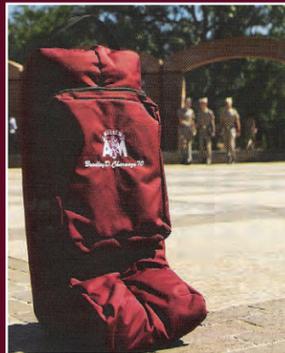
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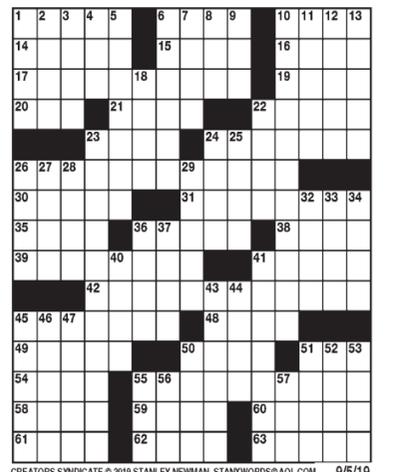
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Newsday Crossword

LONG WEEKEND by Greg Johnson Edited by Stanley Newman www.stanwords.com

- ACROSS: 1 Set designer's concern, 6 Limo rental occasion, 10 Hawaiian carving medium, 14 Trioxigen alias, 15 Be lively during playtime, 16 Russian royal name, 17 Sugar-topped fair treat, 19 Indonesian island, 20 Cooler with blades, 21 Showed joy, perhaps, 22 Toyota hybrid, 23 Copper source, 24 Big name in frozen desserts, 26 Ballerina's footwear, 30 Clear a chalkboard, 31 Highest point, 35 Marine predators, 36 Skips feeding, 38 Transfer, as territory, 39 Nonviolent belief, 41 Nabbed, 42 Low-level flowery space, 45 Builds up, 48 Receiving little precipitation, 49 Thompam's, 50 FBI guy, 51 Place for some savings, 54 Liquid soap dispenser, 55 Bank-issued check.
- DOWN: 2 Tip, as a cap, 2 Pound of poetry, 3 Play phone input, 4 Half and a half, 5 Cabernet, for example, 6 Drive forward, 7 Runaway victory, 8 Web "Wow!", 9 Letters rarely seen on speed limit signs, 10 Grade schooler's proud acquisition, 11 Effective use, 12 Cherish, 13 Licorice-flavor herb, 18 Cozy rooms, 22 Study session, shortly, 23 Where Elvis was born, 24 Rod for roasting, 25 Potato skins and mozzarella sticks, 26 Drip (in), 27 Real estate calculation, 28 Soft mineral, 29 Shout after a knock, 32 Incline (to), 33 Yellow dog of comics, 34 Ivy League nickname, 36 Just dandy, 37 Says "May I?", 40 Electrical safety device, 41 Bad news for bleacherites, 43 That is to say, 44 Cloudy sky color, 45 Adoption org., 46 Handles roughly, 47 Cop to, 50 Eat like a mouse, 51 Pop hero, 52 Honest revision, for short, 56 Copper source, 57 Batter's stat.



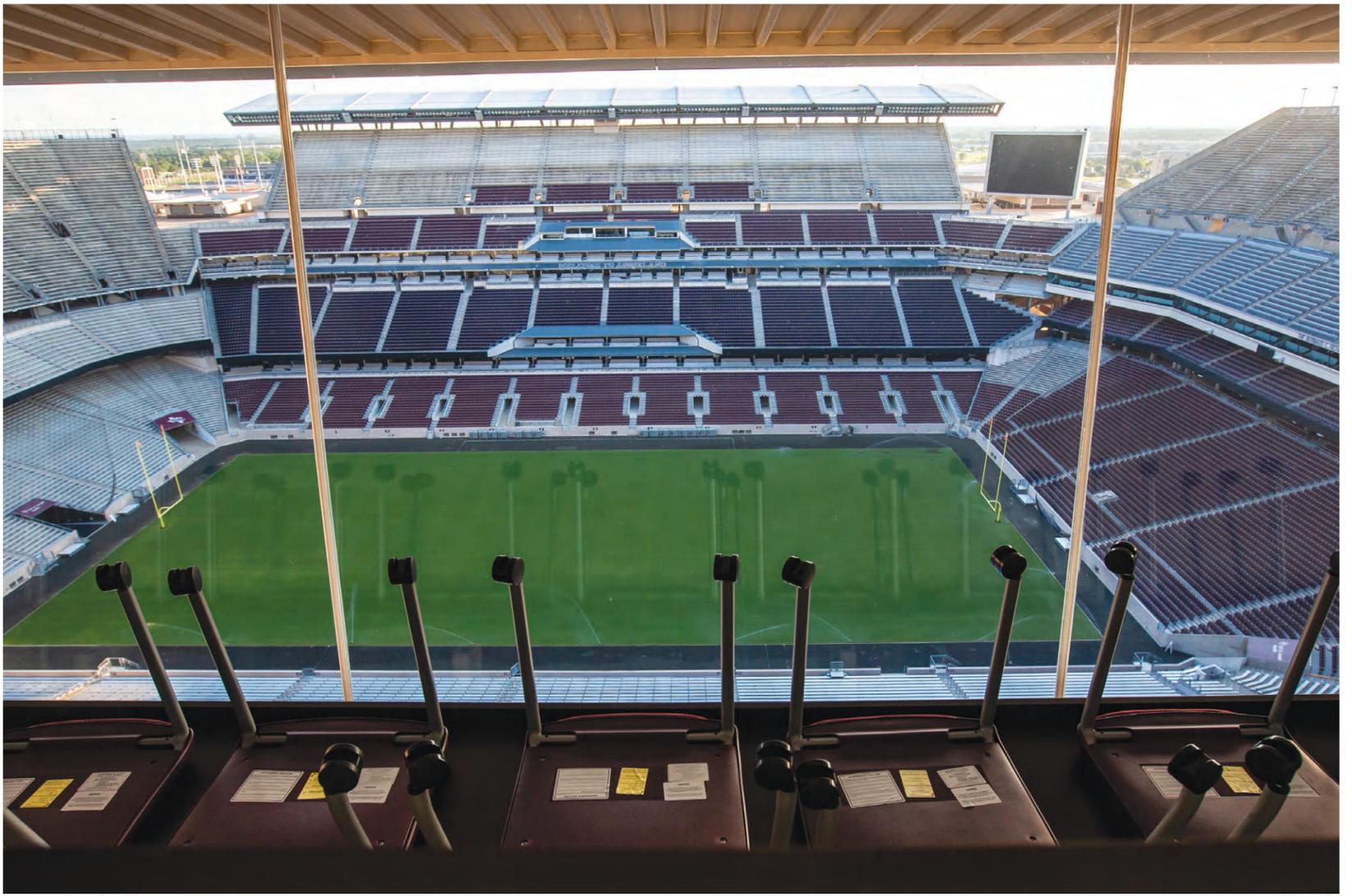
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# THE STATE OF TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS



Meredith Seaver — THE BATTALION

The SEC plans to kick off football season Sept. 26 and full season schedules will be released at 6 p.m. Monday, Aug. 17.

## Sankey, Bjork offer candid updates on college sports with season in limbo

By **Hannah Underwood**  
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The SEC wants to play football this fall. That much is known.

How they'll do it is another question entirely.

While the SEC remains steadfast in its decision to go ahead with the season, plans will likely change if the ACC and Big 12 join the Big 10 and Pac-12 in postponing their fall sports until the spring.

The two conferences made the announcement on Aug. 11, with the Pac-12 also delaying the start of winter sports until the new year, though rumors had been swirling through much of the previous weekend.

SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey joined the Dan Patrick Show just hours before the news broke last week and addressed the possibility of the conference continuing on with its season.

Sankey said the SEC has had precautions in place so they wouldn't have to rush into any decisions regarding the future of fall sports, including delaying the start of the season, easing into full practices for football and implementing extensive testing protocol.

"I felt good on Friday, and then a little tumult over the weekend [when the news broke]," Sankey said. "We're going to keep working day-to-day to see if we can provide opportunities for student-athletes to compete."

Texas A&M Director of Athletics Ross Bjork said in an Aug. 12 appearance on Studio 12, the announcement didn't come as a surprise to him. He said A&M and the SEC will take their time to make a similar decision since new information is almost constantly becoming available.

"Nothing really surprised us with those

outcomes," Bjork said. "But we know that things are fluid, things are changing. The quote that I've used is we're not day-by-day, we're 15-by-15 — we're 15 minutes at a time because things are changing rapidly."

Bjork said while the Big 10 and Pac-12's decisions were based on the discovery of a heart issue called myocarditis in some of the athletes who had tested positive for the virus, A&M has been aware of the condition "since eternity."

"We test for that," Bjork told Studio 12. "We do initial screening when our athletes come on our campus. We did initial screening when they returned to activity for any cardiac issues. If anyone tested positive, they had to pass those cardiac tests before they could return after a positive test. That's not necessarily a new piece of data either. We've known about that; we have the protocols to make it as safe as possible. To me, that's the track that we have to stay on."

Since the Big 10 and Pac-12 announcements, SEC fans have taken to social media to urge the conference to continue with their season, even if they are the only league to do so.

Sankey said while it would be possible for the SEC to be the only conference participating in competition this fall, he is unsure if it is the right decision.

"I don't think that's the right direction, really," Sankey said. "Could we? Certainly. There's a difference between can you do something and should you do something in life."

Bjork said the SEC must rely on its own medical task force and their recommendations, rather than allowing the decisions of other conferences to sway them.

"[The SEC has] to stay the course," Bjork said. "We can't let the noise around us affect us, even though it's very noisy. It's very bumpy. It's going to be rocky over the next couple of weeks as things are just evolving. We provide opportunities. That's our job ev-

ery single day."

In anticipation of the upcoming season amid the global pandemic, both Sankey and Bjork said it comes down to one central idea: preparation.

A&M's preparation has included intensive testing procedures for student-athletes; developing opt-out parameters for those who don't want to risk their health or safety this season; and screening for myocarditis. Bjork said almost all of A&M's student-athletes are taking online classes this semester.

While much of the professional sports world has developed "bubble" environments for their athletes, that isn't something college sports can adopt. However, Bjork said A&M is limiting the amount of staff athletes are coming into contact with on a daily basis, which is a step in that direction.

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**ROSS BJORK,**  
A&M ATHLETICS DIRECTOR

"We've created what we call functional units around our teams," said Bjork, adding that the key is for the athletes in each sport to be on the inside of that functional unit. "You

can't have a lot of people going in and out of that functional unit that don't really have a working function, if you will. So we've created those to try to protect our student-athletes the best that we can. Classes are virtual for our student-athletes. We're doing the best we can to make sure that the data continues to go in a positive direction."

Despite the decisions made by the Big 10 and Pac-12, Sankey said the SEC remains confident in the advice it has received from its Medical Advisory Task Force that has allowed them to continue with summer workouts.

"Were that advice to change, it certainly would be a stopping point," Sankey said. "The indicators are [that] we can, right now, do what we're doing in a healthy way."

A&M football has been participating in meetings and walkthroughs since mid-July, with practice slated to begin Aug. 17. The volleyball and soccer teams began practicing Aug. 7.

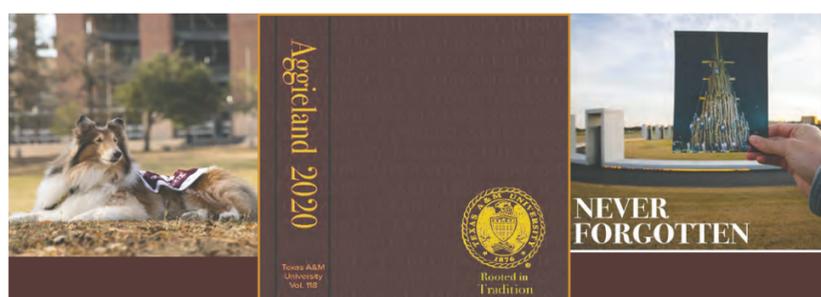
When A&M's classes start on Aug. 19, Bjork said the university and the conference will monitor the effects an influx of students will have on the COVID-19 data.

"The playbook that we've used every single time is, the more time you have the more info you'll have," Bjork said. "The more time you have the more you'll know about the virus even though that's still evolving. Give us time to put the protocols in place."

Sankey said though fall sports seem to be in jeopardy, he encourages fans to remain positive and hopeful.

"I'd keep in mind we haven't made final decisions — there is still some time — but we've set a start date," Sankey said. "I'd be encouraged by that if I'm a college football fan. We announced opponents. I'd be encouraged by that. We have some medical care guidelines. That's encouraging. We're still [here] today. On Sunday, it was all over if I read social media, but we're still here."

The SEC is currently scheduled to kick off the football season on Sept. 26.



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A top-down view of several pieces of white, fluffy popcorn scattered across a bright orange background. The popcorn pieces are of various sizes and orientations, some showing the dark brown hulls.

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