



What a year’s worth of COVID-19 case numbers tells us about how the pandemic affected the UT community.

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Spring 2020
Nearly one year ago, UT canceled classes and closed operations on March 13, 2020. As of Friday, the University has reported 3,632 cases of COVID-19 since March 1, 2020, according to the UT COVID-19 dashboard.

On March 11, former then-UT President Greg Fenves announced that spring break would be extended by one week. Fenves also said the University would implement social distancing precautions after spring break and move some classes online.

“Initially when the quarantine was implemented, the actions were pretty extreme,” business freshman Samhitha Kempaiah said. “I thought it would be enough to decrease the cases of COVID, so I thought it would go on for maybe like a few weeks (or) months. I thought by the summer of last year, it would have been gone.”

On March 13, Fenves announced UT had identified its first two cases of COVID-19 — his wife, Carmel Fenves, and another family member of his who worked at UT.

“That first month was a giant blur in the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) changing their algorithms every four to eight hours,” said Amy Young, chief clinical officer for UT Health Austin. “That evolution to where we have come from those early days to now, those days were some of the most chaotic.”

Austin Public Health and UT Health officials told community members to stay vigilant against the spread of COVID-19 and work toward flattening the curve. Yet cases continued to rise. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a year of virtual learning for many UT students and a dramatic shift in daily life. The Daily Texan took a look back at notable COVID-19 news and case counts from the past year.

Total cases from March 1 - March 31, 2020: 54

During spring break, 211 UT students traveled to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, according to an April 3, 2020, article from UT News. Of the 211 students, 49 tested positive for COVID-19 as of the April 3 article, marking the first recorded outbreak within the UT community.

According to a CDC report published in July 2020, 60 of the 183 Cabo travelers tested positive for COVID-19. About 8% of their household contacts and about 9% of their community contacts tested positive, according to the report.

The second UT outbreak occurred when 10 custodial staff members tested positive for COVID-19 on May 19, 2020.

Total cases from March 1 - May 31, 2020: 135

Summer 2020
“The first month of quarantine, I didn’t mind it that much,” said

Blake Todes, an economics and Plan II freshman. “It really wasn’t until probably August, when I had to start online school, is when it kinda hit me that I’ve been so isolated from other people. ... It felt like I was doing the same thing every day, and it became monotonous.”

A custodial staff member died due to complications from COVID-19 in early July, marking the University’s first COVID-19-related death.

The New York Times published an article on July 28 that showed UT topping the list of most COVID-19 cases compared to hundreds of other universities nationwide.

A UT model report released in mid-August projected that between 82 and 183 UT students would arrive

infected with COVID-19 during the first week of fall classes.

Total cases from March 1 - August 25, 2020: 511

Fall 2020
Austin Public Health officials said in a news conference in early September that UT accounted for 23% of Travis County COVID-19 cases that week.

Throughout the first few weeks of the fall semester, The Daily Texan reported COVID-19 cases in multiple residence halls. The University only informed dorm residents of positive COVID-19 cases if they were living on the same floor as someone who tested positive, and UT said they couldn’t disclose the information publicly due to privacy laws. However, according to previous reporting by The Daily

Texan, the FERPA law only requires the University not to name people who have tested positive.

Five days after the APH news conference, UT announced three COVID-19 clusters totaling approximately 100 positive cases in West Campus.

“People living on West Campus were not taking this seriously,” Kempaiah said. “I knew this because ... I would see people going to parties.”

In late September, Dell Medical School experts said there was little COVID-19 transmission between UT students and Austin residents.

A second University staff member died due to COVID-19 in early October. The staff member was believed to have contracted the virus off campus.

Total cases from March 1 - December 31, 2020: 2,355

Spring 2021
On-campus dorm residents were required to take a COVID-19 test within four days of returning to their residence hall for the spring semester.

More than 330 students, staff and faculty from UT tested positive for COVID-19 in the first two weeks of the 2021 spring semester.

Two cases of the B.1.1.7 variant of COVID-19 from the United Kingdom were detected in the UT community on Feb. 5.

As of March 10, the UT COVID-19 dashboard reports 100 estimated active cases in the UT community. The Proactive Community Testing

positivity rate is at roughly 1%.

The University currently has no plans to require students to get vaccinated, according to previous reporting by The Daily Texan.

The University recommends vaccinations for all members of the UT community, said Art Markman, head of the academic working group for COVID-19 planning at UT. Markman said there “are likely to be some legal hurdles to requiring the vaccine.” He said the University is considering requiring cloth masks in UT buildings for the fall 2021 semester, but that decision will be made based on the best available data.

“We hope, based on this information that the state has shared with us, vaccines will be plentiful, and President Biden has shared this,” Young said. “We hope that most of the students, staff and faculty will be vaccinated, and we are hoping for a return in the fall, but we need to understand more about what’s going to happen over the summer.”

Cases from March 1, 2020 - March 12, 2021: 3,632

Students, faculty and staff should plan to have a “near normal” fall 2021 semester with in-person research and classes, UT President Jay Hartzell announced in a Thursday letter.

UT reported three COVID-19 case clusters in West Campus with about 100 positive cases, collectively.

SEPT. 10

A Duren resident tested positive for COVID-19.

SEPT. 11

Texas football hosted 15,000 fans in their season opener against UT-EI Paso.

SEPT. 12

Dozens of students gathered at the Texas Rho fraternity house in West Campus, and the Austin Fire Marshal shut the party down.

SEPT. 14

A Jester West resident tested positive for COVID-19.

SEPT. 16

A Kinsolving resident tested positive for COVID-19.

SEPT. 17

The University announced it would continue to automatically admit the top 6% of eligible high school students in Texas for summer and fall 2022.

SEPT. 18

UT reported a total of 1,117 COVID-19 cases in the community since March 1.

SEPT. 22

Austin Public Health released a report showing UT enforced 6 out of 10 COVID-19 safety plan provisions at the football season opener against UT-EI Paso.

SEPT. 26

UT officially qualified to apply to become a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

OCT. 4

The UT System Board of Regents appointed Jay Hartzell as UT’s permanent president.

OCT. 6

UT President Jay Hartzell said in a letter that UT would seek guidance from the National Park Service to offer Indigenous remains requested by the Miakan-Garza Band for reburial.

OCT. 12

Austin Public Health reported indications that some COVID-19 case clusters were associated with the football game against UT-EI Paso on Sept. 12.

OCT. 19

Jay Hartzell announced UT’s plans to create a committee to “chronicle the full history” of “The Eyes of Texas” and finalize the renaming of the Robert Lee Moore building.

OCT. 26