

# Study Room Closure

This week, the library had to make the tough decision to close down the study rooms, and no longer allow students to use them due to health and safety reasons. Though signs were posted requiring students to wear masks inside study rooms, and the policy limited the number of people allowed per room, many students were not complying with these policies.

**Why would this be an issue?** Why would it matter if you are wearing a mask if no one else is in the room, or if the other people in the room are your roommates anyway? These are fair questions to be asking, and it's not surprising that anyone might be confused or upset about the decision. So let's talk about how COVID-19 spreads, and about the question of ventilation and aerosols.

## How COVID-19 Spreads

COVID-19 is very contagious. It is spread from person to person through "respiratory droplets." These come out when you exhale, through your nose and through your mouth. It's not just when you cough or sneeze, but just breathing can release droplets which carry virus particles (Centers for Disease Control, 2020). **This is why it's important that your face covering or mask cover your mouth AND your nose.** Many scientists and medical professionals refer to this as "shedding" virus particles. It's like how a dog or cat sheds fur, but invisible, and there are way more particles than individual hairs from your pet.

When somebody sneezes, or spits when they talk, sometimes you can see that - those larger droplets might fall on the floor or on a surface (this is why we ask you to sanitize your desk, in case the person sitting there before you has shed some droplets on the desk).

But in addition to those larger droplets, many scientific studies have now shown that much smaller droplets can become airborne, and linger in the air for hours after a person has left the room - especially in rooms with poor ventilation (Prather, Wang, & Schooley, 2020).

## Study Rooms

If you've been in the library, you can picture the study rooms. Most of them are very small rooms. Since the rooms are small they don't always have adequate ventilation to cycle clean air through. Ventilation is a really important way to slow the spread of the virus, and EOU has worked to improve and upgrade HVAC systems on campus before students returned for the Fall term (Eastern Oregon University, 2020). However, there is only so much that can be done, and it would not be possible to equip each and every study room with its own ventilation system. Therefore, the library staff made the decision to require masks in the study rooms in order to keep them open. A mask (or cloth face covering) can prevent the majority of respiratory droplets from escaping from an infected person's mouth or nose into the room.

**Now let's say an infected person did not wear a face covering, or pulled it down while using the room.** The person might not even know they were infected, because of the high numbers of asymptomatic carriers (that means someone who has no symptoms, but is still infected with the virus, and able to infect other people) (Nikolai, Meyer, Kremsner, & Velevan, 2020). That person could release airborne droplets into the study room, and those could float in the air for hours.

The employees who clean the room in between uses would be exposed to risk of infection, as would all the other people who use that room over the course of the day. They would all be at risk, even if they are wearing their own mask. The mask that you wear does not do very much to protect you from infection - it prevents *other people* from being infected by you (World Health Organization, 2020).



## Conclusion

The decision to close the study rooms was a hard one for library staff to make. It's being done not to punish people, but to protect our staff and all EOU students from infection. This may be hard to understand, especially by those who were following all the rules, and for those who are disadvantaged by the decision, we are sorry.

## References

- Centers for Disease Control. (2020, Oct 5). How COVID-19 spreads. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-sars-cov-2.html>
- Eastern Oregon University (2020). Resumption plan: Safety precautions and protocols.  
<https://www.eou.edu/coronavirus/pandemic-resumption-plan/#protocols>
- Nikolai, L. A., Meyer, C. G., Kremsner, P. G., & Velavan, T. P. (2020). Asymptomatic SARS Coronavirus 2 infection: Invisible yet invincible. *International journal of infectious diseases : IJID : official publication of the International Society for Infectious Diseases*, *100*, 112–116. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.08.076>
- Prather, K. A., Wang, C. C., Schooley, R.T. (2020). Reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2. *Science*, *368*(6498). DOI: [10.1126/science.abc6197](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abc6197)
- University of Nebraska Medical Center. (2020). Coronavirus is not canceled: Wear your mask (Infographic).  
<https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/coronavirus-is-not-canceled-wear-your-mask>
- World Health Organization. (2020, Oct 9). Coronavirus disease 2020 Q&A: Coronavirus disease (COVID 19): Masks.  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answer-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-and-masks>