

More than 15,000 attend University of Texas football game amidst coronavirus pandemic

By Chase Lawrence
14 September 2020

The University of Texas (UT) at Austin held a football game Saturday between the Texas Longhorns and the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP). More than 15,300 people attended the game under conditions in which confirmed cases of COVID-19 continue to spread throughout the state.

Free COVID-19 tests were required only for students who purchased “The Big Ticket” season pass. All other ticket purchasers from UTEP or non-students were exempt and could not get the free tests, accounting for the roughly 14,000 people at the stadium.

A UT Austin spokesperson confirmed that only 1,198 attendees were tested before the game. Out of these, 95 tested positive, or nearly 8 percent. This indicates that the UT Austin student population has an incredibly high incidence of COVID-19.

Prior to the game, the university issued a list of wholly inadequate “precautions,” including markings in the stadium for social distancing, a mask mandate, and a ban on tailgating. They also reported that 225 hand sanitizer stations had been set up.

It is well known that people wearing masks in close proximity for long periods can still acquire the virus. It has also been stated by experts and scientists ad infinitum that any large gathering of people, especially where shouting will take place, has the potential to become a “super spreader” event in which large numbers of people become infected with the virus. In fact, the state of Texas has a ban on gatherings of over 10 people.

The exception to the requirement was made by the Texas Governor Gregg Abbott. He has also exempted various business re-openings and issued a mandate that schools reopen for in-person classes eight weeks after their normal start date.

In a press conference Wednesday, Mark Escott, the

Austin Public Health interim health authority, citing the occupancy limit set for the game, put it mildly: “Having 25,000 people in one space is a concern.”

On the same day, three COVID-19 clusters were reported with about 100 cases.

UT Austin already has a high number of COVID-19 cases, ranking fourth in Texas universities. The COVID-19 dashboard on UT Austin’s website lists 814 cases, with 633 students and 181 staff infected since March 1. The reported positivity rate of 1.3 percent, which is terrible in itself, is most likely an undercount, especially given the case numbers among students attempting to attend the game.

Given the mass gathering, against the express warning of medical science, it is a forgone conclusion that there will be a spike in infections as a result. It is also likely that the virus will infect visiting UTEP students and cause a larger outbreak at their university, where 103 cases have been reported.

The determination of UT to hold the event is bound up with financial interests. UT Austin’s football team is the university’s single most profitable enterprise. UT sports reported a net profit of \$16.5 million in 2018-19. According to numbers from *USA Today*, UT Austin ranked number one in total revenue among the US college sports programs in the same period.

This helps to explain why UT Austin is giving their athletes three tests a week, as they see are seen as profitable commodities. At most universities, sports programs such as basketball, baseball, and football are the most profitable department of the school and receive millions in investment to the detriment of other departments.

Thirteen UT Austin football players tested or were presumed positive for COVID-19 three days into practice that started on June 15. Showing the contempt

the administration holds for students, the university outsourced their testing because the testing set up at the university for students that the administration has touted was deemed too slow, with a team doctor telling the UT Austin Athletics Director Chris Del Conte “I can’t wait around.”

Universities around the country are run like businesses. This is the rationale behind the reopening of universities, additional fees for online classes, and the restart of college athletics. Only a rank-and-file movement of faculty, staff, and students, in solidarity with K-12 teachers and workers everywhere, can stop these criminal policies.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>