

MEMORANDUM

To: All Students, Residents, Staff & Faculty

Fr: David A. Heath, OD, EdM, President *DAH*

Date: 28 July 2021

Re: Fall 2021 – COVID-19 Policies & Protocols

As we move into the month of August, our pandemic management plans for the fall semester have been finalized¹. This communication is intended to provide a summary of COVID-19 related policies and protocols for the college community and for health and safety on our 33 West 42nd Street campus.

This is very important information, please read this in its entirety!

¹ Note: Please bear in mind that with the increasing prevalence of the Delta variant nationwide (and in New York although to a lesser extent), all health and safety policies are subject to change! In particular, given recent guidance by the CDC, it is quite likely that protocols regarding the wearing face masks may change periodically throughout the fall semester.

Current Status:

As you all well know, we have been able to lift many of the restrictions that resulted from the pandemic. We are making excellent progress with the vast majority of our community members having begun or completing their vaccination series. As of July 27th, a full **89% of students/residents/staff/faculty have had at least one vaccine**, while 87% have completed their vaccination series. This includes 91% of students, 94% of faculty, and 81% of staff. Every class has 90% or more of their members having received at least one dose of the vaccine.

It is likely that at least one of the vaccines will receive full approval by the FDA towards the end of August or early September. At that time, pursuant to the Governor's directive, vaccination will become mandatory (with approved religious and medical exemptions permitted) for all students enrolled in the SUNY System. When that occurs, I anticipate that between 92% and 95% of our College community will be vaccinated.

I am also pleased to highlight that since testing began in the fall of 2020, we have conducted 8,047 tests on campus and have an overall positivity rate of only 0.15% with just 12 COVID-positive findings during that eleven month period! Our last on-campus positive test result was in late April. That said, there is a significant uptick in new cases nationally and in NYC due to the Delta variant. The greatest increases are in states/communities with low vaccination rates, but it is a highly transmissible and dangerous variant that further demonstrates why receiving the vaccine is so critical. Notably, it has been reported that up to 99.5% of hospitalizations are of those who have not been vaccinated.

Given the high vaccination rates within our college community, the campus is a relatively safe haven for our community. We are clearly ready for a fuller return to normal campus operations, with an ongoing commitment to the health and safety of our community!

Fall 2021 Summary of COVID-19 Health and Safety Policies

Health & Safety -

1. **Vaccination:**

- **Employees:** While not mandated by the State, all employees are strongly encouraged to become vaccinated, both for their protection (particularly in light of the Delta variant) and others. If you have been vaccinated, but have not uploaded an image of your vaccination card, please do so. **To report:** [Vaccine Status Monitoring \(jotform.com\)](https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Mandatory%20Vaccine%20Resolution.pdf)
- **Students:** On June 23, 2021, the State University of New York Board of Trustees adopted a resolution requiring that all students who plan to have an on-campus presence commencing fall 2021 at any SUNY campus or facility must receive a COVID-19 vaccination, once a vaccine receives full approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ("FDA").¹

Students will only be excused from the COVID-19 vaccination requirement if they qualify for a medical or religious exemption. Final definitions and details will be forthcoming, but generally:

- *Medical Exemption* - may be granted if a licensed and appropriately qualified medical provider certifies in writing that specifically the COVID vaccines may be detrimental to the student's health or is otherwise medically contraindicated.
- *Religious Exemption* - may be granted if the student certifies in writing that the student holds genuine and sincere religious beliefs which are contrary to the practice of COVID immunization. (Note – an exemption would not be granted when opposition to the COVID immunization is premised on political, philosophical, scientific or sociological concerns.)

The request for a medical or religious exemption will need to be made in writing, be detailed and validation may be required. The specific guidance, forms and information required for medical and religious exemptions should be available shortly.

Note - As it is unlikely that this approval will occur prior to the start of our fall academic programming, we will provide reasonable time frames and additional guidance for compliance once this mandate takes effect. The mandate is inevitable and we would

¹ <https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Mandatory%20Vaccine%20Resolution.pdf>

strongly encourage the small number of students who have not yet been vaccinated to do so rather than wait until the mandate takes effect.

Students are required to provide documentation of their vaccination status. This may be done by uploading an image of your vaccination card. **To report:** [Vaccine Status Monitoring \(jotform.com\)](https://jotform.com).

Note – People are considered “fully vaccinated”: (1) two weeks after receiving the second dose in a two dose COVID-19 vaccine series or (2) two weeks after receiving a single dose COVID-19 vaccine.

2. **New or Returning Unvaccinated Students:** Unvaccinated students who have not been on campus on a regular basis over the summer **will need to quarantine for at least ten (10) days upon arrival or otherwise provide evidence of a negative PCR COVID-19 test performed within (5) days** prior to participating in on-campus programs or events. Any such student must also abide by all COVID-19 related health and safety restrictions at the college (e.g., face coverings, social distancing, and mandatory weekly pool-testing). Once one of the vaccines is fully approved, all students other than those seeking a medical or religious exemption must begin the vaccination process immediately.
3. **Mandatory Pool-Testing:** Mandatory weekly Pool-Testing will continue for those not fully vaccinated or who are of unknown status/lack of documentation. This is a SUNY-wide policy, but is also appropriate given our patient-care services. Compliance is being monitored on a weekly basis. Testing details are provided on the College’s COVID-19 News and Resources SharePoint site. [Pool Testing Reminders and Instructions \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com).
4. **Masks:** At this time, fully vaccinated individuals do not need to wear masks and unvaccinated/unknown vaccination status individuals must wear masks. This may change as CDC guidance is updated. Unvaccinated/unknown vaccination status individuals may remove their mask indoors while socially distanced, seated, and actively eating/drinking, or if socially distanced, while working at their workstation. (Note: Vaccinated individuals are certainly welcome to continue wearing a face covering if they wish!)

In effect - those who are fully vaccinated and have submitted documentation do not need to wear masks except as noted below. Unvaccinated/unknown vaccinated status individuals should wear their masks in all areas of the College unless otherwise specified*. (Note – “Unknown” includes those who have not reported their status or who have not uploaded a copy of their vaccination card.)

Note: Level 2 surgical masks (those required in patient care areas and teaching clinics) are most effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Particularly for those who are unvaccinated or have not completed your vaccination series. We are making Level 2 surgical masks available and strongly recommend their use. Level 2 masks are available upon request at either of the security desks on the lobby level.

*If an area (e.g. fitness center, library) is not listed below, the general guidelines regarding masks and social distancing apply.

Exceptions and notes:

- **UEC** - All students, residents, faculty, staff and patients (and other visitors) are **required to wear masks at all times when in UEC patient-care areas**, (floors 5, 6, 7, 8 and the Barbara Saltzman Center for Pediatric Eye Care on the 10th floor). Additional precautions may be required in certain areas as communicated by the UEC administration.
 - **Elevators** – Masks should be worn while riding the elevators and transitioning between elevators on the 5th floor. These are spaces with heavy patient traffic and patients will continue to be expected to wear masks while here. Also, as the four-person elevator capacity limit is no longer in effect, wearing masks while riding the elevators provides a measure of additional safety.
 - **Visitors (other than those going to patient care areas)** – Signage will be prominently placed indicating that visitors who are unvaccinated are expected to wear masks and to comply with all institutional health and safety standards. Visitors will undergo thermal screening and must complete the health screening questionnaire upon entry to the building. Those hosting visitors are expected to communicate expectations in advance and to help ensure compliance.
 - **Clinical Teaching Laboratories** – Generally, mask wearing and other precautions required in patient-care areas will also apply to clinical procedures laboratories.
- 5. Social Distancing:** In accordance with CDC guidelines, unvaccinated/unknown vaccination status individuals need to maintain six feet of social distance. However, in lieu of six feet of social distance, appropriate physical barriers may be used so long as they do not present a health or safety hazard. Unvaccinated/unknown vaccinated status individuals are responsible for practicing social-distancing while on campus whenever practically possible.

Note – This allows for a return to multi-person offices, however, if there is a concern regarding health and safety, barriers (e.g. plexiglass) may be installed.

- 6. Cleaning, Disinfecting & Hand Hygiene:** Protocols for cleaning, disinfecting and hand hygiene remain in place. Please be considerate and clean an area you have been using before you leave.

Note - The College's facilities and maintenance team will continue to follow all CDC and State guidance for proper cleaning and sanitation throughout all areas of the College.

Academic Program Information –

Our teaching spaces will largely be returning to pre-pandemic status including their use at full capacity. Specifically,

1. **Schedules:** Fall schedules are returning to pre-pandemic scheduling. The course schedules were distributed the week of July 19, 2021.
2. **Lectures:** With a few exceptions for off-site adjunct faculty, all lectures are being conducted in-person. As piloted during the spring 2021 academic term, lectures will be in-person, live-streamed via Zoom and recorded.

Note: General rules for face coverings and social distancing apply in the classroom. Those who are fully vaccinated may opt to either wear or not wear a face mask at their discretion and are not required to socially distance.

3. **Labs and small groups:** All labs and small group seminars are returning to their pre-pandemic (normal) capacity and will be fully in-person.
4. **Exams:** All exams will be conducted in-person at the College in the lecture halls. They will not be given remotely. Lab practicals will be in-person as usual.
5. **Small tests and quizzes:** May be given at that discretion of the course IORs. These may be in-person or via Moodle.

University Eye Center (UEC) Information -

1. **CDC Guidelines:** As an Article 28 diagnostic and treatment center, the University Eye Center will continue to adhere to all NYSDOH and CDC guidance for healthcare settings (e.g., cleaning protocols, for patients - symptom and exposure screening, thermal screening, social distancing).
2. **Reporting Vaccination Status:** As per NYSDOH, all employees in healthcare settings are required to report their COVID-19 vaccination status. The UEC will continue to enforce this mandate for initial vaccination, as well as any potential future DOH mandates regarding boosters.
3. **Face Coverings:** All patients, visitors, faculty, residents, staff and students must wear an appropriate face covering at all times while in patient-care areas, as required by NYSDOH.
4. **Cleaning Protocols:** Service-specific cleaning protocols (e.g., diagnostic equipment, clinical devices), as approved by the Environmental and Safety Committee, will continue to be utilized as appropriate.

Research Program Information –

1. **Research:** The College's research programs have been fully operational since the summer of 2020 and will remain so in the fall.
2. **Graduate Education:** Graduate level courses will be taught in-person this fall.
3. **SIVR Colloquia Series:** Presentations will resume in the fall, beginning with the slate of speakers whose talks were cancelled in spring 2020. Speakers are invited to the College, respecting all federal, state, and local guidelines. Most speakers will present in-person, but some may be remote/on-line dependent on the preference of invited speakers.
4. **VisioNYC:** The VisioNYC meetings, which are held at the College and attended by vision scientists throughout the metropolitan area, are scheduled to resume in December and are currently planned to be conducted in-person.

Other General Information -

1. **College Events:** On-campus events must incorporate the appropriate and current health and safety protocols. The focus of this event guidance is for our campus community.
 - All guest speakers / lecturers must abide by the College's policies and be informed of mask wearing, health screening, and other appropriate protocols in advance of coming to campus. Where possible and appropriate, outside speakers should be remotely streamed (via Zoom or other platform) into a live audience on campus.
 - Any external event service vendor such as a/v, catering, or other non-College personnel must wear masks for the duration of their time on campus, complete the Health Screening Questionnaire which is to be submitted to Security when they check in, and follow all established health and safety protocols.
 - For campus events where food and/or beverages are served:
 - Masks must be worn by all personnel delivering or serving food and beverages.
 - Having cleared the Health Screening Questionnaire, delivery personnel will be escorted by Security to the appropriate drop-off location within the building.
 - **Boxed or pre-packaged food options are strongly advised.** Buffets, passed items, or other set-ups where guests would be exposed to "open" or non-packaged self-serve items are discouraged. Additionally, should there be "open" or self-serve food selections, servers wearing gloves and masks will be required. Coffee/tea service for refreshment is acceptable.
 - Lines and gatherings around food/beverages is not advised.
 - Social distancing for unvaccinated / unknown vaccination status attendees should be considered in the event set-up. Of note, CDC guidelines recommend unvaccinated individuals only remove masks while actively eating and maintain physical distance.
 - **CDC recommends physical distancing for all unvaccinated or unknown status individuals. It will be up to the individual to adhere to the appropriate guidelines, though the event set-up should take this into consideration.**
 - Hybrid events which included a limited in-person audience as well as a virtual option for participation should be considered where possible and appropriate.

Events or gatherings for and with external audiences will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by College leadership taking into consideration the risk to the campus community, guidance from appropriate regulatory bodies including SUNY System, and any limitations on size or activity that may need to be present to prioritize the health and safety of our campus community.

2. **Travel:** The College's travel policy (relative to the pandemic) is posted on the website, (<https://sunyopt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Travel-Policy-4-16-21.pdf>), and in Sharepoint. Please review this prior to any travel, particularly if it is international.

As of July 1st, essential College-related travel is permitted. At this time, all travel requests by employees must be reviewed and approved in advance by one of the vice-presidents or the President.

- 3. Employee Telecommuting:** The State's pilot tele-commuting policy **officially terminated** as of July 2nd. However, guidance received from the GOER (Governor's Office of Employee Relations) allowed state agencies some flexibility to ease employees' transition back to normal operations. Employees of the College of Optometry (as previously communicated) are to return to work fulltime no later than August 2, 2021.

Compliance –

Although we hope it is unnecessary, failure to comply with these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action. Failure to comply will be considered under standard investigative and disciplinary processes. Disciplinary action for employees is guided by the collective bargaining agreement and for students by the Student Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct which may be found in the Student Handbook, <https://sunyopt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/StudentHandbook.pdf>.

Stay Safe, Stay Healthy!