

MEMORANDUM

To: All Students, Residents, Staff & Faculty
Fr: David A. Heath, OD, EdM, President *DAH*
Date: 9 August 2021
Re: Fall 2021 – COVID-19 Policies & Protocols: Amended 9 August 2021

Although it has been less than two weeks since my communication of July 28th, conditions have been shifting with increasing cases of the Delta variant of COVID-19, particularly among the unvaccinated and consequently there is changing guidance at the state, local and federal levels.

As a result, I am writing to address two specific issues: 1) a new vaccination mandate and 2) revised guidance regarding required wearing of face coverings/masks.

Mandatory Vaccinations:

On July 28th, Governor Cuomo announced that all “patient-facing” healthcare workers (including students) at New York State-run hospitals/healthcare facilities must be vaccinated. The College of Optometry is included in this order and testing in lieu of vaccination is no longer an option. Labor Day, September 6th was put forth as the deadline for compliance.

Accordingly, with the July 28th directive, the State University of New York College of Optometry is adopting a mandatory vaccination policy for all employees and students effective September 6th.

While those working in the University Eye Center are most engaged with patients, given the health care nature of our programs and the physical structure of the facilities with the University Eye Center on floors 5, 6, 7, 8, & 10, everyone encounters patients on a periodic basis, and in the case of the elevators in close proximity.

Requests for exemptions for medical and religious exemptions will continue to be permitted. As over 90% of the College community has now received at least one dose of the vaccine, the impact of this order applies only to the 10% of employees/students not yet vaccinated.

Employees who have yet to be vaccinated are entitled to four (4) hours of leave scheduled during their regular work hours, without charge to their leave credits. If you experience any side effects after the vaccine, you will be entitled to the use of sick leave (or other accruals with prior supervisory approval) under the New York State Civil Service time and attendance rules. Employees who are vaccinated outside their regular work schedules do so on their own time.

- 1. Time Frame** – Those required to be vaccinated must receive their first dose (only dose if it is the Johnson and Johnson vaccine) prior to September 1st and submit evidence (image of the vaccine card); second doses (if Pfizer or Moderna) must be received and reported by October 1st. **To report each vaccination:** [Vaccine Status Monitoring \(jotform.com\)](https://www.jotform.com).

- 2. Exemptions** – Those who are mandated to get vaccinated may apply for a medical or religious exemption. Please notify Nurse Cris Gomez if you intend to apply for a medical or religious exemption by August 20th and completed applications for an exemption are due prior to September 3rd.
- Exemption application forms are attached to the cover email to this memorandum and are also available from Nurse Gomez (cgomez2@sunyopt.edu).
 - Applications will be reviewed by a five-person exemption review committee and a decision will be made or, if needed, additional information requested within 10 business days.
 - Those who receive exemptions are required to **wear masks at all times** and are responsible for maintaining social distancing when possible.
 - Those who receive exemptions are also **required to be tested on a weekly basis**. You may participate in pool-testing at the College, or get tested at an external site and submit the results to Nurse Gomez.
- 3. Notification** – Those employees and students who are unvaccinated or who have not reported their status, will receive an individual email notifying them of the mandate deadline for compliance. Failure to comply will result in the initiation of disciplinary action.
- 4. Pool-testing** – Weekly Pool-Testing remains mandatory for anyone who is not fully vaccinated or who has not submitted their documentation.

Masks/Face Coverings:

The CDC recently issued revised guidance on the use of masks/face coverings while leaving implementation to state and local jurisdictions. The revised guidance links the wearing of face coverings indoors to the local prevalence of COVID cases per 100,000 population. New York City has not mandated the wearing of face coverings indoors at this time. That said, we are taking a more cautious approach and are expanding those areas of the College within which face covering/masks must be worn.

Effective immediately, and out of an abundance of caution, we are reinstating mandatory wearing of face masks/coverings by both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, when in -

- 1. Lectures Halls and other teaching spaces including the theater:** During lectures, all students (both vaccinated and unvaccinated) must wear face coverings. Those lecturing may remove their mask to ensure the clarity of sound both for those attending in person and those accessing the lecture remotely through video/audio links.
- 2. Teaching Laboratories:** ASTM level 2 surgical masks are still required in teaching laboratories. This is the same as it has been, and students will receive a supply of masks at the start of the semester.
- 3. Public Spaces:** This now includes hallways, the student center, the library, and the fitness center, in addition to the lobby and elevators as previously specified.

4. **UEC:** Continues to require all students, residents, faculty, staff and patients (and other visitors) **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.

In Conclusion –

The college has been a consistently safe place throughout the pandemic with low infection rates because of our collective mitigation efforts, including the use of screening tools and protective equipment, efforts to get our community members early access to the vaccine and masking protocols that change in direct response to the risk at any given time. The changes in our policies are the result of the increasing incidence of COVID, mostly in the unvaccinated population, and the increased transmissivity of the Delta variant. I would like to emphasize that **if you feel ill for any reason, please stay home! And, if you are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19, please get tested!**

Finally, please continue to 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 of face masks may change periodically throughout the fall semester based on the prevalence of COVID-19 in the broader community.

Stay Safe, Stay Healthy!