



MEMORANDUM

To: All Students, Residents, Staff & Faculty
Fr: David A. Heath, OD, EdM, President *DAH*
Date: 1 November 2021
Re: President's Missive - Fall 2021: COVID-19 Update

It's been over a month since I last provided the community with an update on the College's COVID-19 status and actions to continue to limit the impact of the pandemic and secure the health and safety of the community. The increase in time between communications is a positive sign as it suggests stability in our policies and in the external environment. While most of our policies will continue as they are, there are some changes following the extraordinarily successful vaccination of the community.

Vaccinations:

Since my communication of September 20th, the deadline for faculty and staff to be vaccinated has passed. I am pleased to share some fast facts that place us in a lead position among all SUNY institutions:

1. As of October 31st, 99.3% of the community has received at least a first dose of a vaccine and 98.0% are fully vaccinated. There are six medical and/or religious exemptions among our staff - bearing in mind that the religious exemption option is pending judicial review.
2. No one has left the college nor have any employees been suspended due to a failure to become vaccinated or receive an exemption prior to the deadline.
3. While not currently required, members of the community have begun securing vaccine 3rd doses and booster shots. Although, the approval for at risk populations was only recently approved, 105 (15.5%) students, staff and faculty have received a booster as of October 31st.

Key points:

1. **Report each vaccination: [Vaccine Status Monitoring \(jotform.com\)](https://www.sunyopt.edu/vaccine-status-monitoring).** Whether you are completing your two dose series or now getting a booster please, remember to promptly upload the image of your card as requested! The College is required to regularly submit up-to-date vaccination data on the College community.
2. **Boosters (NEW!):** Though not mandated at this time, I would encourage everyone to get a booster shot when the timing is appropriate (6 months after the second dose of an mRNA vaccine or two months after the Johnson & Johnson single dose). The College has begun arranging for booster clinics on campus. The first was for Pfizer on October 24th and the next offering will be the Moderna booster on Thursday, November 4th. Dr. McGovern and Nurse Gomez will arrange additional booster clinics if the demand is there. You certainly cannot find a more convenient arrangement and I would encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity.

3. **Exemptions:** The State's exclusion of religious exemptions for employees is progressing through the courts. It is uncertain as to when a decision will occur. Should the State's exclusion of religious exemptions be upheld, we will work with those impacted to provide the time needed to come into compliance.
4. **Leave for booster vaccinations (NEW!):** The COVID Vaccination leave policy was amended to include up to 4 hours of paid leave for COVID-19 booster vaccination. Employees are entitled to a leave of absence for COVID-19 vaccinations scheduled during the employees' regular work hours. Employees who undergo vaccinations outside their regular work schedules do so on their own time.

Pool Testing (NEW!):

1. **Weekly Pool-Testing remains mandatory for anyone who is not vaccinated** (those with exemptions), or not yet fully vaccinated.
2. **Random surveillance testing** of fully vaccinated individuals will begin Tuesday, November 30th. The college will be pool testing 12 employees and 12 students on-site every Tuesday, in addition to those who require weekly testing due to an approved religious or medical exemption.

The model for this random surveillance testing program is geared towards a more independent check-in process and specimen collection. The new location for this testing program will be in the Folsom Conference Room (rm. 1223) on the 12th fl. Further details will be forthcoming from Nurse Gomez with important instructions.

3. **New Employees:** If you are new to the College and have not submitted a prior saliva sample for COVID-19 previously, please make sure you are registered on the testing site, [Clarifi COVID-19 \(clarifi-covid-19.com\)](https://clarifi-covid-19.com), prior to the start of this testing program.

Masks/Face Coverings:

Pursuant to CDC Guidance and New York City requirements, all personnel (i.e. faculty, staff, students, patients and visitors) are still required to wear masks indoors. While the number of cases/100,000 people is decreasing in NYC, it is likely to be a few weeks before we can relax indoor mask requirements (for vaccinated individuals) per CDC Guidelines.

As a result, we are continuing the August 9th directive mandating the 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. Students receive a supply of masks at the start of the semester.
3. **Public Spaces:** This includes the lobby, elevators, hallways, the student center, the library, and the fitness center.

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). Students, residents, staff and faculty are to wear ASTM level 2 surgical masks in all clinical settings. Additional precautions may be required in certain areas as communicated by the UEC administration.

Events:

1. **Social Events:** With the increased risk associated with the Delta variant, on-campus College and student events will be limited to members of the College community.

Note: We have begun to permit (with approval) some **larger scale social events** on a limited basis with precautions in place. We will evaluate these as they occur and modify our policies as appropriate.

2. **Outside Visitors/Speakers - Individuals:** Generally efforts should be made to ensure that outside speakers/visitors provide evidence of vaccination. If a speaker or visitor is not vaccinated, they should be informed College's mask and social distancing requirements and that compliance is expected.
3. **Outside Participants for Larger Events:** For larger events involving more than one or two outside participants (e.g., Continuing Professional Education, student/doctor networking), evidence of vaccination will be required for all external participants and they must wear masks at all times. This includes speakers, industry representatives and attendees.
4. **Food & Beverages:** The protocols for serving food and beverages were included in the July 28th communication and remain in force.

Compliance:

As a reminder incidences of non-compliance may be reported through the SafeInSight app under the iReport tab.

In Conclusion:

- **If you feel ill for any reason, please stay home!** And, if you are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19, please get tested!
- **Beware of complacency!** We must continue our mitigation efforts including the proper use of PPE, hand washing, and modifying our behaviors based on our surroundings.
- **All health and safety policies are subject to change!** Please continue to bear in mind that with the increasing prevalence of the Delta variant nationwide, and given 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!