1. Is Messiah requiring students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to enroll during the 2021-22 academic year?

No; Messiah University is NOT requiring students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to enroll for the 2021-2022 academic year. Messiah’s position remains, however, that a widespread vaccination of our campus community provides the fullest protection for our students and employees and the best opportunity for us to return to normal, pre-pandemic operations.

Note: some students due to their specific higher-risk work or program placements, the campus health care center for example, do require vaccination. While Messiah is not requiring students to have the COVID-19 vaccination to enroll, some enhancement programs, such as but not limited to, cross-cultural experiences and other international travel, may require students to be vaccinated. Additionally, some off-campus program partners, such as school districts for student teaching or healthcare clinical sites, may require students to be vaccinated to participate.

2. Has Messiah changed its definition of what it means for students and employees to be up to date with their vaccinations?

Yes. As referenced in Messiah’s updated institutional COVID-19 protocols released on Jan. 20, 2022, the University has integrated the CDC’s expansion of its definition of being “up to date with vaccination” to include a booster shot. Effective Feb. 15, 2022, any Messiah University program or protocol that required participants to be “fully vaccinated” will now require participants to be “up to date” with their vaccination for COVID-19, defined as individuals who have had a booster shot or those who are within 6 months* of completing a Pfizer or Moderna vaccination series or within 2 months of a Johnson & Johnson vaccination. These protocol updates include university enhancement programs, such as but not limited to, cross-cultural experiences, service opportunities, and other international travel. Additionally, some off-campus program partners, such as school districts for student teaching or healthcare clinical sites, may require students to have their vaccinations up to date to participate.

*Since the release of Messiah’s updated spring protocols, the CDC has indicated that individuals are now eligible for a booster shot 5 months after completing a Pfizer or Moderna vaccination series.

3. Does Messiah’s Engle Center provide vaccination and booster shots for students and employees?

Yes. The Engle Center offers free COVID-19 vaccinations (Moderna) to students and employees and employee family members (aged 16 or older) every Wednesday. COVID-19 boosters are now available as well. A limited number of appointment slots are
available on a first-come, first-serve basis. To set up an appointment for your COVID-19 vaccine, go to your HEALTH PORTAL, then choose MY FORMS from the menu bar and complete the form entitled COVID VACCINATION SCHEDULING FORM. Someone from the Health Center will be in touch to schedule your appointment.

4. What is the difference between a booster shot and an additional dose?

A booster shot is administered when a person has completed their vaccine series and protection against the virus has decreased over time. Additional doses are administered to people with moderately to severely compromised immune systems. This additional dose of an mRNA-COVID-19 vaccine is intended to improve immunocompromised people’s response to their initial vaccine series.

5. Should I inform Messiah University if I have been vaccinated and/or if I receive a booster shot off-campus?

Yes, it is important for Messiah to know from a public health standpoint how much of its population has been vaccinated. Current students and employees who have been fully vaccinated or who have received a booster shot off campus should submit/update proof of vaccination to the Engle Center:

- Go to the Online Health Portal (https://messiah.studenthealthportal.com);
- Go to MY FORMS, then COVID IMMUNIZATION HISTORY FORM

Students and employees who receive their vaccination or booster shots through the Engle Center will have their vaccination status automatically updated in their campus health portal.

6. What if I’ve already had COVID-19? Does the University consider this in its campus health protocols?

Not currently. The CDC is no longer recognizing previous infection with COVID-19 as a category in its protocols and strongly recommends that you should get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you already had COVID-19.

Getting sick with COVID-19 offers some protection from future illness with COVID-19, sometimes called “natural immunity.” The level of protection people get from having COVID-19 may vary depending on how mild or severe their illness was, the time since their infection, and their age; and no currently available test can reliably determine if you are protected after a COVID-19 infection. All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States are effective at preventing COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine gives most people a high level of protection against COVID-19, even in people who have already been sick with COVID-19.

Emerging evidence shows that getting a COVID-19 vaccine after you recover from COVID-19 infection provides added protection to your immune system. Read more about natural immunity from the CDC website.

7. Why doesn’t Messiah accept antibody tests for those who have previously had COVID-19 as proof of natural immunity against future infection?
Messiah acknowledges that there is a broad range of perspective on the use of antibody testing to infer natural immunity from COVID-19. However, in setting consistent standards for its own institutional health protocols, the University’s position is that—due to limited data on how much protection and for how long antibodies provide protection against reinfection—antibody tests should not yet be used to conclusively evaluate a person’s level of immunity or protection from COVID-19.

Messiah’s position is consistent with that of the CDC, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Mayo Clinic, the Cleveland Clinic, and the American Academy of Family Practice, among other public health organizations, that the research in this area is simply not definitive enough at this point—particularly when trying to manage the spread of COVID-19 in a congregate living setting such as Messiah. These public health entities additionally recommend that individuals should be vaccinated, regardless of whether they have already had COVID-19, due to the added protection it provides against future infection.

8. Can I get COVID-19 even if I’m fully vaccinated?

While COVID-19 vaccines are working well, no vaccine is 100 percent effective. As new variants emerge, some people who are fully vaccinated against COVID 19 are still getting sick. These are called “breakthrough infections.” Still, we know that overall, being fully vaccinated significantly reduces your chance of getting sick and missing out on in-person experiences and opportunities and mitigates the severity of disease if you do contract COVID.

9. Aren’t college-aged people some of the least likely people to be severely affected by COVID-19? Why the need for vaccination?

The data show that individuals in all age groups can be severely affected by COVID-19. The data also show that the largest group of unvaccinated individuals is comprised of 18–30-year-olds. With numerous variants circulating worldwide, most currently the highly contagious Omicron Variant, a large population of unvaccinated individuals—especially in congregate settings—can be detrimental to not only the physical health of Messiah’s community, but in our ability to remain open throughout the academic year.

Additionally, Messiah’s campus has students and employees who are themselves, or live with individuals, in high-risk categories. Encouraging vaccination is just one of the many ways we can be good neighbors and friends and help protect those we encounter both on and off campus.

You may learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine at the national level on the CDC website, or at the statewide level on the Pennsylvania Department of Health website.