Announcing Messiah’s vaccination policy for fall 2021

The medical and scientific data at this time indicate that the vaccines approved by the FDA for emergency use in the United States are highly effective in protecting against the spread of COVID-19. Messiah University sees these vaccines as our institutional path back to normal life and strongly encourages all students and employees to be vaccinated. That said, given some public uncertainty due to the newness of the vaccines and the fact that full FDA approval has not yet been granted, at this time Messiah University is not planning to mandate COVID-19 vaccination for students or employees for the fall 2021 semester. It is important to note that changes in the pandemic or vaccine approval status could trigger a re-evaluation of this policy. However, should a COVID-19 vaccine mandate be put into place at some point in the future, it would be similar to our current student vaccine policy, which includes options for both religious and medical exemptions.

While not mandated, it is extremely important that the majority of our student and employee populations be vaccinated prior to the start of the fall 2021 semester in order to assure a safe and undisrupted in-person educational experience, particularly for populations in congregate living settings, such as in residence halls, where spread of COVID-19 can be rapid and difficult to contain. We greatly appreciate our students and employees who have already been vaccinated for COVID-19, and we continue to encourage as many as possible to continue to do so. (Current students and employees should upload documentation of their vaccination via the Engle Center’s Online Health Portal at https://messiah.studenthealthportal.com/Document.)

Widespread vaccination of our campus community provides the best opportunity for us to return Messiah to normal, pre-pandemic operations and to make university life feel much more like it is supposed to be for everyone.

Important preliminary considerations

The University has many remaining details to process in the weeks ahead – but here are some preliminary parameters related to COVID and vaccination that we can confirm:
• **Testing and quarantine:** The continuance of ongoing surveillance testing this fall will depend on the percentage of students and employees who are vaccinated. As we approach or exceed herd immunity levels (estimated to be ~80 percent), the need for ongoing surveillance testing will diminish, and potentially be eliminated. For those students who contract COVID-19, or are identified as unvaccinated close contacts, the University will continue to provide isolation/quarantine space this fall, as well as temporary remote access to in-person classes. *Note that these protocols differ for vaccinated and unvaccinated students, as is our current practice*—i.e., fully vaccinated students are generally exempt from surveillance testing and from quarantining when exposed as a close contact.
  - Pre-arrival testing and quarantine requirements for students prior to the start of the fall 2021 semester will also likely vary by vaccination status.

• **Campus residences:** Messiah will offer on-campus housing available for all undergraduate residential students who want to live on campus in the year ahead, and the University does not plan to separate vaccinated from unvaccinated students in campus residences. In compliance with CDC and state guidelines, we will likely need to continue some level of mitigation for masking, distancing and visitation, especially until herd immunity is achieved—*some of these protocols, however, will likely vary for vaccinated and unvaccinated students as they currently do,* e.g., at present, while masking on campus is required for everyone, fully vaccinated students can visit with other fully vaccinated students unmasked in their residences.

• **Off-campus programs:** While Messiah is not requiring the COVID-19 vaccine to study, live or work* on campus, it is important to note that students and employees may be subject to vaccination requirements related to off-campus programs such as clinical or professional field placements with external partners, internship/practicum site locations, international study or other off-campus study (domestic or abroad), etc.
  - *Note: While Messiah is not requiring widespread vaccination of its employees, the University reserves the right to require vaccination for specific groups of employees based on their professional role.*

Messiah will continue to announce related decisions in the weeks ahead via Messiah mass email communication and on our emergency blog.

We are very grateful for the cooperation, perseverance and care for others that you have shown that have allowed us to stay open and be together in person for the past year—and we look forward to an even more active, vibrant community “Together at Messiah” next fall!

—*The Messiah University Integration and Response Team*