

## Replies to August 19, 2021 Town Hall Q&A (and chat):

### Teaching Modality/Classroom Protocol Inquiries

- If an instructor comes down with COVID and teaches hyflex, does that mean they are allowed to teach from home? If so, do students need to come to the classroom?

If you are told to quarantine by UF Health Screen, Test & Protect, you cannot come to campus. If you are asymptomatic and feeling well, you may continue to teach through HyFlex or other online technologies. If you are ill, you will need to take sick leave and recuperate according to your doctor's instructions. Your department will be responsible to cover your course load. Please see this diagram for additional guidance: <https://hr.ufl.edu/covid-19/additional-information-for-leaders/ufhr-guidance-to-hr-liaisons-on-covid-19-response-for-employees/>.

Students may come to class or they may attend online while the faculty member delivers instruction through HyFlex or other online technologies.

- Can I mandate the use of mask in my own office?

Faculty may require masks when meeting with students in the faculty member's office. If the student declines to wear a mask, the faculty member may arrange to meet with the student online or at an alternate time/place.

- Can you please inform us what are the classroom protocols where a student is positive, the classroom is very small, and the students have to work in groups and one infected student could infect the whole class?

Faculty should consult their class rosters before each class to determine if they have any students who have been withheld from campus and ensure that those students are not attending class.

- If instructors suspect they have COVID, will UF support their decision to move class sessions online until they get tested and receive a negative test? In the absence of that accommodation, the advice to "stay home" won't work for instructors.

If an instructor feels ill, then the instructor should remain home on sick leave and consult a physician or UF Health Screen, Test and Protect. As indicated above, the

department becomes responsible for covering the course in the case of an ill instructor. Faculty do not have the option to “move class sessions online.”

- Can we teach on Zoom if we are sick before we can get tested? Do we just cancel our classes that day?

See response in previous questions.

- What if you are symptomatic and unable to teach your class even via hyflex - what is the proper procedure to follow? Thank you in advance.

You should take sick leave, consult with your physician, and notify your department chair that you are unable to teach.

- What can/should instructors do if a student becomes antagonistic after we ask them to please wear a mask?

Instructors can remind all students that they are expected to wear a mask in the classroom. If a student refuses, they cannot be told to leave or to move to a different location in the classroom. In an instance where a student becomes disruptive to classroom operations, please report inappropriate behavior via the COVID-19 Behavioral Report Form available at:

[https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofFlorida&layout\\_id=18](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofFlorida&layout_id=18)

### **University Policy and State/State University System (SUS) Inquiries**

- Alachua county just instituted a 1-week mask mandate. Does that apply to us?

The county mandate does not apply to UF.

- How can we mitigate the impact of this on our institutional reputation? All our aspirational peer-group has implemented mandatory vaccination, masking, and biweekly testing as well as a lack of political litmus testing.

UF has received national recognition for transparency in sharing comprehensive COVID case information and also for large-scale vaccination effectiveness, including engagement with local underserved communities. A lack of authority to mandate the vaccine and masks can be mitigated by all members of our UF community choosing to be vaccinated and choosing to wear a mask.

- In what way specifically is our state university in a different relationship to state government than all other universities (in other states)?

Universities in the Florida State University System (SUS) are more dependent on the state for resources than universities in other states, due to disproportionately low tuition in Florida. Also, there is a tradition of significantly increasing regulation of the public universities in Florida (new policies and laws) annually, more than in other states.

- Why are other dress codes (with no bearing on individual or public health) allowed to be enforced as a requirement but not a mask?

The lack of authority to mandate a mask is specific to this pandemic and is not connected to the university's ability to implement and enforce other mandates.

### **UF Facilities/Operational Inquiries**

- Will comfortable non-disposable masks be made available at the start of classes to encourage incoming students to wear masks?

Yes. Like previous semesters, students may pick up Gator Care Kits, which include two reusable masks, hand sanitizer, tissues, and other supplies for the semester. Additional information including pick up locations can be found at:

<https://studentlife.ufl.edu/gatorcarekits/>

- If because of state govt we can't mandate masks, online, or vaccine, could we at least bring back the quarantine dormitories for students who get infected?

If a student lives on campus in a residence hall or in a sorority or fraternity house and needs to be withheld from campus, the University of Florida will no longer provide students alternative housing for quarantine or isolation. If students have extenuating circumstances (i.e. international or out-of-state students), accommodations will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

If a student lives in Graduate and Family Housing and needs to be withheld from campus, that student may remain in their apartment.

- **Is there an option for a financial incentive for students to get vaccinated?**

The University of Florida is helping to incentivize vaccinations with our students. By getting vaccinated, students may receive prizes ranging from hammocks, Gator gear, Air Pods, and athletic event fan packages, to Mac Books, iPads, campus meal plans, and more.

- **What about employees who are required to travel off-campus into low vaccination, unmasked, crowded settings? Is the university considering restricting non-essential travel to protect employees from having to put themselves in these situations?**

At this time, there are no plans to restrict the travel of UF employees that are traveling on university-related business.

- **Can we get HEPA air purifiers in the classrooms for extra mitigation strategies?**

Currently MERV 13 air filtration is in place in most campus buildings, which is the air filtration standard recommended by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). MERV stands for the “minimum efficiency reporting value”. MERV measures how effectively a filter removes particles from the air, with higher MERV ratings catching more particles.

Facility Services also continually evaluates new technologies related to air exchange and filtration systems and stays current on the best practices issued through ASHRAE. HEPA filtration is most often used in medical facilities and is not recommended for standard office or teaching space.

- **Is active monitoring of classroom air exchange planned for the fall semester?**

Yes. UF Facility Services continues to monitor our buildings and classrooms, including the number of air exchanges and the level of fresh air introduced into the spaces. UF also has building automation systems that continually monitor the effectiveness of these systems.

- The university is currently only providing each faculty member two (2) N95 masks for the semester - will there be additional masks made available?

UF employees are eligible to receive one mask per workday, or 20 masks per month. If you are in need of a mask, please reach out to your area's HR Liaison or designated point of contact.

### **COVID-19 Medical and Testing Inquiries**

- We can't require unvaccinated to be tested weekly, can we just require that everyone be tested? I have been vaccinated, but I would be happy to get tested weekly if it means that positive students would be withheld.

We cannot require the unvaccinated to be tested. We have recently been given permission to test students identified during a contact investigation through what we are calling expanded targeted testing. We do not have the capacity to test all students on campus every two weeks but we can test all students that are part of our expanded targeted testing that will include residence halls as well as classrooms.

Our medical opinion and recommendation is that all students, faculty, and staff be vaccinated and that this is a requirement for attending school or work. With full FDA approval and over 3.5 billion doses given worldwide, there is little question about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. It does not make sense to us medically to require vaccines with similar approvals like those for measles, mumps, and rubella and not require them for a similarly preventable infection, COVID, that is killing 1000 Americans per day and 1000 Floridians per week at present during the delta surge.

- If it's not possible to test only the unvaccinated due to BOG order, would it be possible to test everyone on a rotating basis (i.e., surveillance testing)? Several other universities are doing this (Duke, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, etc.) even for vaccinated students.

We will essentially be doing this but through our targeted testing plan since we cannot perform 52,000 tests every two weeks much less do this many tests every week. We will try to focus on the higher risk individuals, residence halls and classrooms with identified cases in a targeted testing approach. This will lead to a level of testing similar to the Spring semester.

- What are the quarantine policies if a student in the class tests positive? Will we be notified that they are positive?

The isolation policy for confirmed and suspected cases is the same as it has been throughout the pandemic, positive individuals will be withheld regardless of vaccination status. Professors will not be notified of any student or staff members status, only that they are being withheld. This is the same as during the previous semesters.

- Is there a downside of getting a booster vaccine before 8 months after your 2<sup>nd</sup> shot?

We are encouraging boosters for individuals who are immunosuppressed and over the age of 65. There is at present, some debate in the medical community regarding the need for boosters in healthy individuals under the age of 65. Regardless, if a booster shot (third dose of Pfizer or Moderna or a second shot of any vaccine for Johnson and Johnson recipients), there is no harm to our knowledge if it is done before 8 months. We are recommending no sooner than 4 months.

- What actually is believed to happen after 8 months? Do you essentially become “unvaccinated”?

No, we do not believe that people become unvaccinated. As mentioned above there is some debate as more data is being collected as to the true risk of fully vaccinated people who do not get the booster. The risk is more clear for those over 65 and immunosuppressed individuals for whom we are now strongly recommending a booster.

- I'm sure you are aware "researchers have found that people who only suffered mild infections can be plagued with life-altering and sometimes debilitating cognitive deficits" (Mullin 2021). Surely, this emerging reality should weigh on how we proceed in our institution.

Yes, we are aware and there are many things weighing on us as we find a reasonable path forward.

- What kind of care will you be providing for faculty who will inevitably contract COVID because of classroom exposure? What happens when there is not enough beds at the SHANDS ICU?

Anyone who gets ill will be cared for in the same fashion as they do in any other situation where they may become ill for any other reason. We are very fortunate to live in a community where we have sufficient capacity to handle the increase in cases that has occurred with the delta wave of COVID.

- Will UF have COVID-19 booster shots available this fall?

Anyone who is over 65 or attests to having an immunosuppressive condition can get a booster shot right now at anyone of the more than 30 sites throughout Alachua County including UF Health, UF Health STP, the Health Department, and numerous retail pharmacies.

- Dr. Lazaurdo, could you talk about prevention measures we might take to boost our immune systems -- I have heard mention of Vit.D, exercise, other??? How much we should we be focusing on these kinds of approaches too. Or is that not even worth discussing?

Eating and sleeping well as well as getting regular exercise is always a good idea and boosts the immune system. However, these sensible activities and habits are no substitutes for getting vaccinated, wearing a mask indoors including vehicles with people you do not quarantine with, and staying home and getting tested if you have symptoms of COVID.

- Students have asked me, if you did not have side effects from the vaccine, might it be that you did not mount a good immune response and you are not well protected?

This is NOT TRUE. Although the common side effects caused by the vaccine are the result of the immune system responding, the lack of symptoms is not predictive at all of a lack of adequate response.

- Can we move the testing back to the center of campus with walk up testing? Ben Hill Griffin? That worked well last year and I think encouraged people to be tested.

We are in the process of finding other sites on campus that will be more convenient and accessible. We agree the stadium was a great option and will look for suitable alternatives.

- Will UF Health be providing Covid boosters, or for those of us vaccinated by UF Health in Jan/Feb, will those now be provided through Alachua County Health Department?

All vaccine providers will be providing boosters and will do so regardless of where the previous dose or doses may have been given.