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Matthew Revitt <matthew.revitt@maine.edu>

An Important Update for Fall Semester 2021

1 message

Chancellor Dannel Malloy <chancelloroffice@maine.edu>
Reply-To: chancelloroffice@maine.edu
To: matthew.revitt@maine.edu

Wed, Aug 4, 2021 at 3:01 PM



August 4, 2021



UMS Community Members,

I write today about an important decision we have made in our ongoing efforts to learn and work and research safely in the coming fall semester, our second together during the worst public health crisis the world has seen in more than a century. I write to each of you as important members of our university learning communities -- communities that work together to advance knowledge and thrive on the consideration of diverse fact-based views and respect for each other's wellbeing.

When we live and work and learn together, we form social bonds in a largely unwritten social compact to take care of each other. Indeed, this commitment to communal health and safety is a foundational element of a properly functioning civil society. When we choose to live and work and learn and socialize together in groups -- in communities -- we understand that doing so safely requires that we each commit to common standards that we all understand are necessary to keep us safe together.

Today, with the fast-spreading Delta variant prolonging the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, that commitment to communal health and safety requires that the University of Maine System join the more than 640 other colleges and universities in the country that have announced some form of COVID-19 vaccination requirement to live, work, or learn together in person in our university communities. In making this important announcement for UMS, I want to stress that fully remote learners who don't participate in on-campus activities may choose not to be vaccinated. And we will recognize appropriate medical and religious vaccine exemptions and continue our discussions with our labor partners about how to best implement these requirements for faculty and staff. Those students who begin the process of becoming fully vaccinated by August 20, 2021 will be able to be a part of our in-person community this fall. [You can see our policy statement here.](#)

The realities of the pandemic are sobering. It's not over. Globally, more than 4.25 million people have died from COVID -- nearly 615,000 in the United States alone. New cases, hospitalizations, and deaths attributable to the Delta variant and COVID are surging, largely where vaccination rates are low. If there is a silver lining to the onset of the Delta COVID case surge, it is that more people who haven't yet gotten vaccinated but are able to do so are starting to do so -- and with great impact. The COVID vaccines work. More than 99.99 percent of people fully vaccinated against COVID have been protected against breakthrough cases that lead to hospitalization or death, according to the latest data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. In short, the vaccine allows us to be together more safely.

The recent public health history in the United States gives us an important measuring stick to understand how significant the COVID vaccines are in our fight to end the stubborn COVID pandemic.

In 1900, fully one-third of all deaths in the United States were caused by infectious diseases. That number had dropped to just five percent by the mid 2010s due almost entirely to biomedical science advances in vaccine development and distribution. Over the same period, infant mortality decreased from 14 percent to just 0.6 percent, again due to the ready availability of safe and effective vaccines. Polio and smallpox killed or maimed literally hundreds of millions of children and adults around the world well into the latter half of the 20th century -- yet today, only a generation or two removed from that time, these diseases are mostly historical footnotes, because modern science and medicine gave us safe and effective vaccines, widely distributed, to essentially eradicate them from daily life for the majority of the world's people.

Enrolling in our universities today requires proof of vaccination against diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, and rubella. We do this so that our living, learning, working, and socializing together, often in closed or close quarters, doesn't spread sickness or death from these diseases among us. With such safe and effective COVID vaccines available to us now, so it must be with that disease as well if we are to safely live, work, and learn together. Our communal responsibility to each other requires no less among all who can safely obtain the vaccine.

As of today, more than 10,300 members of the UMS community have voluntarily submitted proof of full COVID vaccination. I hope more members of our UMS community will do so. But our responsibility to keep the entire UMS community safe now requires that all who can be vaccinated must do so to fully participate in the on-campus in-person life of our universities.

I have never been prouder of my UMS colleagues than through the pandemic. Your work and effort and commitment and resilience is laudable, particularly so because the work was done for the common good of all in our universities. You've kept us safe so far, and with today's commitment to use the most powerful weapon we have against COVID so far, we're committing anew to keep each other safe this fall.

Thank you for your work and commitment.

Sincerely,



Dannel P. Malloy
Chancellor

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