



PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE



August 2, 2021

Good evening, Lobos—

It is with great enthusiasm that I welcome you back on our first day of full operations in over a year. I understand that the transitions we've needed to make, the COVID-19 safe practices we've employed, and the need to be flexible in our approach to keeping our university community healthy have been taxing on all of us. But I assure you, every decision that has been made has been grounded in maintaining a safe and inclusive environment, while delivering on our promise of an exceptional academic experience.

With cases of COVID-19 rising throughout the country and across New Mexico due to the Delta variant-- and with the recent research demonstrating that vaccinated individuals, though themselves protected from serious illness, can be significant spreaders of the much more contagious Delta variant, putting all unvaccinated people at even more serious risk — we have had to seriously reconsider our announcement on July 8th that we would not mandate vaccinations. The incentive programs we began offering on July 15th have moved the needle some on vaccinations — as of today, nearly 9,000 faculty, staff, and students have confirmed their vaccination status, and I am grateful to all of you who have made the effort to protect yourself and others.

However, it has become all too clear that incentives will not be enough to protect the health and safety of our Lobos. So, we must lean into the groundwork we've already laid in the development of a vaccine requirement and respond today to the current public health landscape.

This morning, I asked the UNM Board of Regents to endorse [a mandatory vaccination requirement, necessitating all Lobo students, faculty, and staff to be fully vaccinated as quickly as possible](#), but no later than Thursday, September 30th. With the support of the Regents, this mandate will go into effect beginning Thursday, August 5th.

This is not a decision that has been made lightly and is, for the safety and well-being of our communities, a necessary and responsible course correction. UNM has had for some time a vaccination requirement under consideration; earlier this year, we [issued a draft policy for public comment](#), which was discussed at a number of public meetings and town halls. When we made [the determination on July 8th that we would encourage, though not require, vaccination](#), we were optimistic that this approach, with the addition of incentive programs, would sufficiently inspire the Lobo community to get fully vaccinated.

Unfortunately, as infections have increased around the state and the nation, our vaccination rate has not kept pace in a manner sufficient to ensure we can protect our community from a similar outbreak. In short, with cases of COVID and its variants slowly increasing, if we wish to return to a fully operational campus in a manner that protects the safety of our community, encouraging vaccination and mask wearing is not enough.

I am certain you have questions. Let me take a moment to answer a few of them—and we will, of course, continue to keep you advised through our [Bringing Back the Pack website](#).

WHOM THIS VACCINATION REQUIREMENT AFFECTS

Our mandatory vaccination applies to all UNM personnel and students who access UNM facilities, housing, programs, services, and activities located on the Main Campus and Academic Health Sciences Campus in Albuquerque and the Branch Campuses at Gallup, Los Alamos, Taos, and Valencia. Campus facilities include, but are not limited to, office buildings, libraries, classrooms, dormitories, research laboratories, dining facilities, student centers, athletics facilities, entertainment venues, gymnasiums and university buses and shuttles. This mandate does not apply to employees of UNM Hospitals, UNM Medical Group and the Sandoval Regional Medical Center, as these UNM entities have specific policies pertaining to their employees and facilities.

ACCOMMODATIONS

We understand that there are some who will not be able to be vaccinated, due to disability, medical condition, or sincere religious belief.

Disability/Serious Medical Condition

If a covered individual cannot receive the COVID-19 vaccine due to a qualifying disability/serious medical condition or medical contraindications or precautions recognized by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or CDC, a request for a reasonable accommodation must be submitted to the Compliance, Ethics, and Equal Opportunity Office for employees including faculty and student employees. A person who is granted a reasonable accommodation may be required to adhere to additional safety measures to ensure the health and safety of the individual and the University community, including but not limited to asymptomatic surveillance testing and symptomatic testing.

Students requiring medical/disability accommodations in their academic environment must submit a request to the Accessibility Resource Center.

Religious

A reasonable accommodation to the COVID-19 vaccine mandate may be granted based on a person's sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance. A request for reasonable accommodation must be submitted to the Compliance, Ethics, and Equal Opportunity Office. A person who is granted a reasonable accommodation may be required to adhere to additional safety measures to ensure the health and safety of the individual and the University community, including but not limited to asymptomatic surveillance and symptomatic testing.

EXISTING POLICIES CONCERNING COVID-SAFE PRACTICES

Under this action, all staff, faculty, and students are expected to follow all existing policies and guidelines requiring COVID-safe practices, including appropriate use of either personal protective equipment and/or face coverings, social and physical distancing, frequent handwashing and cleaning, and regular surveillance testing.

HOW DO I SHOW PROOF OF VACCINATION?

All employees and students must provide documentation of full vaccination using a vaccine authorized by FDA License or under an FDA Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). International students vaccinated with a vaccine from the World Health Organization Emergency Use List (EUL) may submit documentation of that vaccination; these students are recommended to be vaccinated again upon arrival in New Mexico using an FDA approved vaccine and subsequently submit documentation of that vaccination. [A website for the purpose of these uploads will be available.](#) Employees and students that have already provided proof of vaccine status are not required to resubmit proof documents.

CAN I GET A TEMPORARY EXEMPTION?

While available vaccines are under EUA, UNM employees and students may request a temporary exemption to this vaccination mandate. Such employees and students will be subject to regular COVID testing, requiring that upon demand they produce documentation of a negative COVID-19 test within seven days of such request, with the sample having been collected within seven days of submission of the test result. Once any vaccine for COVID-19 is available under regular FDA License, this exception by test will no longer be available. COVID-19 testing required under this exemption will be at the expense of the employee or student seeking the exemption; [the State of New Mexico has contracted with a test provider that currently will provide tests free of charge and use of this service is encouraged.](#)

WHAT RESTRICTIONS WILL BE IN PLACE FOR ME IF I AM NOT VACCINATED?

To protect the health of our community, all employees and students who are not vaccinated may be subject to restrictions on access to UNM facilities, including but not limited to Johnson Center Gym, Student Union Building (SUB), University Libraries, and various events. Other limitations on their access to university programs may be imposed for the safety of the UNM community.

Employees working entirely remotely can request an exemption on that basis. This request must attest that the employee will not access any university site or facility at any of our campus locations for any purpose and must be endorsed by the employee's supervisor. An exemption form will be provided to make this request, which must be signed by the employee and supervisor, and then uploaded by the employee at the [vaccination verification site.](#)

WHAT IF I LIVE OUTSIDE NEW MEXICO AND ATTEND CLASSES REMOTELY?

Students who are completing a remote online program while residing outside New Mexico during the Fall 2021 or Spring 2022 semesters may request an exception to the vaccination requirement. An exemption form will be provided to make this request, which must be signed by the student and the dean of the student's academic unit, and then uploaded by the student at the vaccination verification site.

While this new mandate goes into effect on August 5th, individuals who upload proof of full vaccination by August 31st will continue to be eligible for the previously announced Vax the Pack incentives. In addition, the State of New Mexico has just announced that [any New Mexico resident who gets vaccinated by August 31st will receive \\$100.](#)

New Mexicans aged 12 and up are eligible for a free vaccine, so if you have not yet done so, please [schedule an appointment to receive the vaccine](#) at a location near you. It's safe and easy, but if you need more information on vaccines and how they work, [the UNM #10to100 website can help answer your questions.](#) To make things even more convenient, a vaccination clinic is now open at the Student Union Building (SUB) Atrium on the UNM Main Campus, running Monday thru Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. now through August 27. There will be additional Saturday dates on August 14th and 21st, also from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

In addition to implementing a vaccination requirement, we have also been following recommendations from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by requiring everyone, regardless of vaccination status, to [wear a mask indoors at all UNM locations in Albuquerque, Taos, Valencia, McKinley, and Sandoval.](#) This masking policy went into effect today, August 2, 2021. I know that it has been difficult for those who have experienced the freedom of going without a mask after being fully vaccinated to have to mask up again. I thank you for doing so—we are protecting others while we push to reduce this pandemic's impact on our lives, and I personally feel good about doing that.

I appreciate your continued diligence and commitment to your own health and that of others.

Get vaccinated.

Regards,

Garnett S. Stokes
President