




March 1, 2022

TO: Leadership Council

FROM: Devinder Malhotra, Chancellor 

RE: The Next Phase in Our Pandemic Response

It is hard to believe that it was two years ago when we made the decision to suspend international travel. I did not know at the time that we would spend the next two years responding to a global pandemic, one that has affected us all both personally and professionally. I want to again recognize the creativity and resilience that you have shown in supporting our students. We have been able to shift in ways—and at a speed—that we could not have imagined prior to 2020.

With all that we have learned and experienced, now is the time to look ahead to the next phase of our work as a system. For some, our changes will be welcome news. For others, these changes will be challenging to adapt to. Our work as leaders is to help our campus communities navigate these changes with clear communication, backed by the evidence, data, and guidance supporting our decisions. As our cases in Minnesota continue to decline, those decisions will increasingly fall to you as campus leaders. In what follows, I want to outline the specific changes that we will be making, the data that will inform our shifts, and the expectations of the data that you will need to monitor and the information that you will need to regularly share with the system office as you make campus-level decisions. As I have emphasized in previous memos, consistent and regular communication with campus student, employee, and faculty groups to consult with and inform them about changes to mitigation strategies is critically important, particularly to provide the context for our ongoing monitoring and application of MDH and CDC guidance.

New CDC COVID-19 Community Levels

On Friday, the CDC updated the metrics used to inform their mitigation recommendations, most importantly including masks (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>). Their measure now has three levels: low (green), medium (yellow), and high (orange). The levels are based on a mix of case rates, total new COVID-19 admissions over 7 days, and the 7-day average of percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied. Masks are not required at the "low" level. At "medium," the recommendation on masks is to "talk to your healthcare provider" if you are at high risk for severe illness about whether you need to wear a mask, so it's at the individual level and not a global mask recommendation. At

"high," the recommendation is to "wear a mask indoors in public." Under this new set of measures, twenty-eight of our locations are in "low" or "medium" levels, including all of the seven-county metro area. That means that 26 locations remain in the "high" level.

Face Coverings

All 37 colleges and universities and the system office have required face coverings for all faculty, staff, students, and visitors since August 3, 2021. With the CDC changes announced last Friday, our approach will change as of today, March 1, 2022.

For colleges and universities in counties in the "low" or "medium" levels, presidents can immediately communicate that masks are no longer required in indoor public settings, in accordance with updated CDC guidance. As I noted above, you may choose the timing of making these changes, but you will be required to follow the updated CDC guidance and lift the mask requirement no later than Friday, March 4. In other words, colleges and universities cannot continue to require masks in indoor public spaces if the CDC community level is "low" or "medium."

For colleges and universities in counties in the "high" level—including multi-campus colleges with a mix of levels across different counties—presidents can choose to announce a date, no sooner than Friday, March 4, on which the mask requirement in indoor public spaces may be lifted. The continued improvement in healthcare capacity and the continued, steady decline in case rates suggests that even counties currently at the "high" level will fall into the "medium" or "low" category in the coming days or weeks. If you choose to lift the mask requirement while your county is still at a "high" level, you must notify Brian Yolitz (brian.yolitz@minnstate.edu) of your plans and your timeline.

The CDC has not updated its masking guidance for healthcare and clinical settings. As a result, campus clinical settings, such as student health centers, dental clinics, etc., will remain subject to indoor masking requirements until that guidance changes. If you have questions about masks in clinical or other programmatic settings, please contact Brian Yolitz (brian.yolitz@minnstate.edu).

The college or university approach to masking is an institution-wide determination, and individual faculty or staff cannot deviate from the institution's overall approach (except in those programmatic areas noted above or identified by campus leadership after conferring with Brian Yolitz). Regardless of county-level data, individuals may choose to continue wearing masks, and campuses should respect and support those choices except in circumstances where masks present a safety risk (e.g. in certain lab contexts). In addition, the updated CDC guidance recommends that individuals who are immunocompromised or at a high risk for severe disease should talk to their healthcare provider about whether masks or other precautions are warranted.

Looking ahead, assuming that your county remains at the “low” or “medium” community level, there will be no systemwide mask requirement planned for the summer nor fall 2022 terms. If local community levels or campus cases increase, then masking requirements may be reimplemented after consultation with MDH, local public health officials, and the system office.

Student Proof of Vaccination and Testing Guidelines

The existing guidelines for student proof of vaccination or testing as it applies to students in residence halls and other specific situations will remain in place through March 13. **Starting Monday, March 14, there will no longer be a proof of vaccination or testing requirement for students living in residence halls or other activities designated by the college or university.** No requirement will be in place for summer and fall 2022, assuming community levels and campus cases remain at “low” or “medium” levels. Some students may remain subject to MMB Policy #1446 as student employees (should that policy remain in force); to NCAA or other testing related to athletic programs; or may be required to be vaccinated or to test by an external organization that serves as a clinical or internship placement site.

MMB Policy #1446

For the time being, MMB HR/LR policy #1446 *COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination and Testing* for employees, contractors, and vendors remains in place. MMB has indicated that they will be reviewing and updating this policy in the coming weeks. We will share any updates once we receive them.

Weekly Case Reporting

To ensure that we monitor the impact of these changes and remain apprised of the COVID-19 status at colleges and universities, we will continue to require weekly student and employee case reporting through the existing reporting process at least through the remainder of the spring semester. Should cases increase, colleges and universities should deploy additional testing resources (available from MDH) and consider implementing the mitigation measures suggested by the MDH higher education guidance and the updated CDC community level guidance.

Out of State and International Travel

Given the various changes, we wanted to provide a summary of the requirements for out of state and international travel. In general, we have returned to normal operating procedure for the review and approval of travel, as outlined below.

- **Out of State Travel:**

For domestic travel, approval of college/university sponsored domestic travel requests by students, faculty, or staff will revert to the existing campus process. All travel should continue to adhere to MDH and CDC guidance and local travel advisories, and approval to travel is applicable at the time of actual travel.

- **International Travel and Education Abroad Programs:**

For international travel for employees, campus presidents can continue to approve international travel to countries under a level 1 or level 2 [travel advisory from the US Department of State](#). Travel to level 3 or level 4 countries will continue to require prior approval from the system office ([System Procedure 5.19.3](#)). Requests for employee travel to level 3 or level 4 countries should be submitted to Eric Davis, Vice Chancellor for Human Resources (eric.davis@minnstate.edu), along with a presidential endorsement of the request.

For international student travel commencing on or after May 1, 2022, campus presidents have the authority to review and approve travel to destinations listed at a level 1 or level 2 travel advisory from the US Department of State. For destinations listed at a level 3 or above, system procedures [3.41.1](#) and [5.19.3](#) continue to apply: requests for international student travel must be submitted for review by the chancellor. Those requests should be submitted to Nate Hallanger (nathan.hallanger@minnstate.edu). Requests for travel to countries at level 3 or above will be expected to demonstrate that a thorough risk assessment has been undertaken for the program prior to and during the travel period of the program, in addition to providing standard information about the proposed travel (dates, numbers of travelers, academic requirements that the travel might fulfill, etc.).

MDH Outreach to College Leadership on Vaccine Outreach

MDH will be reaching out to college presidents to discuss and get feedback on college partnership and participation in community vaccination education and outreach efforts. MDH views our colleges as key members of our communities, and is eager to gather feedback on opportunities and challenges to educate more Minnesotans about the importance of getting vaccinated.

Spring 2022 Vaccination Data

The spring 2022 student vaccination data from the MIIC database bulk query are included below. The student one-dose coverage numbers are similar to the rates that were based on our December bulk query. The spring 2022 student data does not include concurrent enrollment students who attend courses in high schools, and is based on preliminary campus headcounts from early February.

Data Monitoring

These are the key data sources and guidance that we will continue monitoring to support our decision-making, especially if cases begin to rise on campuses or in our communities.

- **Minnesota Department of Health Guidance for Higher Education:**

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html>

The higher education guidance from MDH serves as a resource to inform decision-

making and responding to outbreaks.

- **UPDATED CDC County-Level Transmission:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>
Updated on February 25, the CDC county data now has three “COVID-19 community levels”: low, medium, and high. CDC has indicated that this data will be updated weekly.
- **Minnesota State COVID-19 Case Dashboard:**
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaMTRmNWMyNDMtMmIxNC00YzM3LWVMTQ tM2JmNzBiMDgzZWVklwidCl6IjUwMTFjN2M2LTBhYjQtNDZhYi05ZWY0LWZhZTc0YTky MWE3ZiIsImMiOiN9>
- **Minnesota COVID-19 Public Health Risk Measures:**
<https://mn.gov/covid19/data/response-prep/public-health-risk-measures.jsp>
This dashboard of Minnesota information can assist in monitoring hospital admission and capacity metrics statewide and by region (<https://mn.gov/covid19/data/response-prep/response-capacity.jsp>).

Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) Student Data
Percent of Spring 2022 Initial Campus Headcount with at Least One Dose of a COVID-19 Vaccine

Campus	February 1, 2022
Alexandria Technical and Community College	42%
Anoka Technical College	60%
Anoka-Ramsey Community College	64%
Bemidji State University	63%
Central Lakes College	52%
Century College	70%
Dakota County Technical College	60%
Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College	66%
Hennepin Technical College	63%
Hibbing Community College	57%
Inver Hills Community College	73%
Itasca Community College	56%
Lake Superior College	64%
Mesabi Range College	51%
Metropolitan State University	76%
Minneapolis Community and Technical College	71%
Minnesota State College Southeast	58%
Minnesota State Community & Technical College	45%
Minnesota State University Moorhead	60%
Minnesota State University, Mankato	69%
Minnesota West Community & Technical College	48%
Normandale Community College	72%
North Hennepin Community College	71%
Northland Community & Technical College	40%
Northwest Technical College - Bemidji	53%
Pine Technical and Community College	50%
Rainy River Community College	44%
Ridgewater College	48%
Riverland Community College	62%
Rochester Community and Technical College	73%
Saint Paul College	71%
South Central College	61%
Southwest Minnesota State University	61%
St. Cloud State University	66%
St. Cloud Technical and Community College	52%
Vermilion Community College	56%
Winona State University	75%
Systemwide	65%

DATA NOTES: These percentages were calculated using the MIIC Bulk Query process to determine the percent of student headcount that have received at least one dose of one of the COVID-19 vaccines. The percentage was based on preliminary student headcounts as of the query date in February 2022. This bulk query excluded concurrent enrollment students taking courses at high school locations.