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UVI Makes Covid-19 Vaccination Mandatory for Students and Staff

Coronavirus / **Published On June 28, 2021 09:34 AM /**

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UVI St. Croix Campus (Albert A. Sheen Campus)

The University of the Virgin Islands announced Monday that after much discussion and debate, and in consultation with the V.I. Department of Health, the UVI Board of Trustees voted on Saturday, June 19, to institute mandatory vaccinations for all students and employees.

UVI issued a previous release about the June 19 meeting, but did not reveal this major decision. Calls placed to Tamika Thomas, head of public relations at UVI, were not immediately returned.

“This decision was made based on what the Board felt was in the best interest of the entire UVI community,” said UVI President Dr. David Hall. “Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on this

nation and the world. This virus can be fatal and we have seen those consequences.”

Mr. Hall continued, “Though there are numerous ways in which individuals can protect themselves from the virus, the best scientific evidence demonstrates that the various vaccines are the best protection for individuals and communities.”

Can schools mandate Covid-19 vaccines?

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), citing Dorit Rubinstein Reiss, a public-health law professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law, schools and school districts generally don’t have the authority to mandate student vaccines.

But other authorities can: namely, state legislatures or health officials acting under legislative authority, according to Reiss.

The one exception is New York City, where a 2018 court case over flu vaccinations implies that city officials can likely require student vaccines in addition to the ones authorized by the state.

According to UVI, instituting mandatory vaccinations has been a national trend, wherein approximately 500 universities and colleges have also embraced mandatory vaccinations in one form or another.

UVI said its policy does include legally recognized exceptions and that the method for applying for these legally recognized exceptions will be provided by legal counsel in the near future.

"In addition, for Eastern Caribbean students, who do not have ready access to the vaccines, they will be provided their first shot upon arrival and will have to commit to regular testing until they are fully vaccinated," the institution stated.

The effective dates for compliance with the mandatory vaccination requirement are as follows:

- Students: Aug. 9, 2021

- Staff: Aug. 1, 2021

- Faculty: Aug. 11, 2021

If compliance does not occur by the deadline, then employment for staff and faculty will be adversely affected, and for students, attendance for in-person classes will be prohibited, UVI said.

"The online courses and degrees that are part of our normal online degree program will remain available for those who choose that form of education. There are a limited number of courses that will be offered in a “hybrid” format, so that remote learning will be possible," UVI said.

"However, the University does not have the resources to make every course or degree program available remotely. For more information on UVI’s online degree course-listing, visit www.uvi.edu to see those degrees and courses that will be available online this Fall."

“As the only institution of higher education in the Territory, the University’s mission is to make education accessible to Virgin Islanders,” stated Mr. Hall. “Yet, UVI also has a responsibility to create a safe environment for students and employees.”

UVI said it will provide in the near future the method and procedure for compliance with the policy. This method will be provided in conjunction with the V.I. Dept. of Health.

For more information, contact the Public Relations Office at pr@uvi.edu or at (340) 693-1057.

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