



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

November 22, 2021

Dear UNE Community,

I am writing with an update on the COVID-19 Response Committee's ongoing deliberations about our health and safety protocols. Each week, the committee has taken time to discuss when it will be appropriate to move to a mask-optional policy for vaccinated students, faculty, and professional staff. In our most recent meeting, we spent a great deal of time on this topic, and we came to the consensus that we will likely make that change in some settings beginning in January.

We continue to experience extremely low incidence of the virus among our students, faculty, and professional staff, and we have seen no evidence of transmission on our campuses, despite vaccinated members of our community eating together without masks in our dining facilities, students living together in their dorm rooms without masks, and our varsity student athletes practicing and competing without masks. Additionally, by January, children ages 5-11 can be fully vaccinated, providing an additional layer of protection for families. While we are concerned about the persistent levels of infections and hospitalizations across the state, the evidence has demonstrated that our nearly 100% vaccination rate among the UNE population is keeping the virus at bay among our own community. We will continue to monitor our own data, as well as relevant data in our surrounding communities, over the coming weeks.

We have not finalized the details of the plan yet, but we are considering a phased approach in which masks will still be required in classrooms, clinical skills settings, and labs but will be optional for vaccinated members of our community in other settings. We will continue to work on this plan and will provide more information by early January, so please keep an eye on your email.

Adults who are six months out from their second vaccine are now eligible for COVID-19 booster shots. We are not yet requiring a booster dose at this time, but we strongly encourage all members of our community to get one as soon as they are eligible. Our Office of Student Health Services is also developing plans to offer vaccine booster clinics in the new year, so please stay tuned for more information.

As we approach Thanksgiving, I want to send a sincere message of gratitude to you all for your patience, your care for one another, and your resilience as we have navigated the pandemic together. As we all know, it is not over, and we will need to continue to be flexible as the situation remains dynamic and can always change. But it is my hope that this news will give you something to look forward to as we approach the end of a successful but challenging semester and look ahead to the new year. I wish you all a restful and enjoyable Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,

James D. Herbert
President