Vaccinations

Our last Return to Campus (RTC) message was about how testing for COVID-19 is an essential tool in our efforts to keep our college safe as we carefully make efforts to return to campus and incrementally and safely add more in-person instruction this fall. Testing allows us to identify potentially infectious individuals so that we can both help them manage any personal health issues and to prevent them from potentially infecting others on campus and in our workplace. To date, our on-campus testing has returned a very low rate of positive tests: well under 1% of tests have been positive.

We now have another very important tool at our disposal to help us in our RTC efforts: vaccines for COVID-19. We have had some time to evaluate the results of vaccination, and we can make these general observations:

- **The approved vaccines are remarkably effective.** The original intent of the first group of vaccines, such as Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J was not to prevent an individual from catching the virus, but to minimize the symptoms of those infected. This goal was to substantially reduce the chance of death or major symptoms if one got infected. What we have found is that they substantially reduce having minor symptoms, as well as lowering the overall chance of getting infected or in transmitting the virus if infected. We also know that for a small percentage of people, these vaccines, for whatever reason, will not provide any protection and that a very small number of vaccinated people still get infected. Overall, vaccines are very safe and very effective.

- **There is a significant percentage of the population who are not getting vaccinated.** For example, in Alameda County, 81% of the population ages 12 and up, have had at least one dose, and 68% of this age group are fully vaccinated. For the state, these rates are 67% and 57%, respectively. While these are good numbers, it also shows us that 33% of the state population has not received even one dose.

- **Unvaccinated people are at risk of catching COVID-19.** Overall, the rate of COVID-19 infection is much lower than it was a few months ago. But, this can be deceptive. The pandemic is still here. People are still getting infected and the population that is getting infected are those who are unvaccinated. Now, there are more dangerous variants of COVID-19 circulating that are more contagious, and whose symptoms are more severe. As an example, when the state of Washington began investigating outbreaks of COVID-19, they found that the common theme was unvaccinated people getting together without masks and without social distancing.

So, the question remains: how do we keep the unvaccinated population safe when on campus?

There are a variety of reasons some people do not want to be vaccinated. Some are allergic to certain components in the vaccine. Some have historical reasons to distrust government-mandated medical treatments. Others have strong religious reasons to refuse it. At Ohlone College, we are legally mandated to provide a safe work environment for our employees. In
particular, we have specific regulations we need to follow when it comes to keeping our staff safe from COVID-19. We are now seeing, at the federal, state, and county levels, distinctions being made between vaccinated and unvaccinated populations and what they can, and cannot, do. For example, Cal/OSHA, the state agency responsible for worker safety, has stated that folks who can document that they are fully vaccinated do not have to wear masks in their workplace, while those who are not vaccinated, must continue to do so. While we develop plans to ensure consistency in our guidelines, we will continue to require all staff to wear masks indoors, and all staff can unmask outdoors. Our policies will evolve in order to be consistent with the laws and regulations within which we need to work.

This is a lot of information to process. The key takeaway is that Ohlone College makes your safety it’s #1 priority. Laws are made that tell us what to do. There is a lot of guidance that suggests what we might want to do. The benefits of vaccinations far outweigh the risks. Lack of vaccination leaves one exposed to more contagious and potentially deadlier variants of COVID-19. The decision is yours to make, but policy is increasingly being made that makes life easier for the vaccinated population.