

INFLUENZA VACCINE REQUIREMENT Q&A

This year, out of concern for the potential for very serious or life-threatening illness in the campus community caused by anticipated simultaneous community transmission of both influenza and COVID-19, the University is requiring an influenza vaccine for students, faculty and staff (including other academic personnel) living, working or learning on campus any time beginning November 1, 2020, and continuing through the end of the flu season. This is in line with the guidance issued by the California Department of Public Health for higher education institutions and consistent with CDPH and CDC recommendations, as well as the recommendations of the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Getting a flu vaccine is one of the most critical steps students and others can take to protect their own health and do their part in supporting their community during the global health crisis. By getting vaccinated for influenza, students will significantly decrease the chances that they or their friends will become ill with flu this fall, and also help ease the burden on the health care system, ensuring that those critically ill with COVID-19 and other life-threatening health concerns are able to receive the care they need.

The cost of the vaccine to students will be covered by all Affordable Care Act-compliant medical insurance plans, including the UC Student Health Insurance Plan (UC SHIP). Vaccinations are widely available throughout the state at local retail pharmacies and other locations near where students may be residing, as well as through campus health centers.

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Why are you requiring the flu vaccine for students who are living, working or learning on campus this year?

This is an important action to protect the health and well-being of our students during this unprecedented public health crisis.

Evidence has shown a high attack rate of influenza in young adults — they are more than twice as likely as someone 65 or older to develop a symptomatic flu infection.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu vaccination among adults is effective in preventing the most severe forms of flu and reducing the risk of becoming sick enough to require treatment at the hospital or ICU.

The incidence of both influenza and COVID-19, which are transmitted the same way, are both expected to rise during the flu season. Along with protecting individual health during the concurrent flu season and COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccine requirement is expected to mitigate the spread of serious illness within the larger UC community (and by extension, among our families and surrounding communities). During the overlapping flu season and COVID-19 pandemic, mitigating the spread of flu not only protects individual and public health, it decreases the burden on health care providers and hospital systems struggling to provide critically needed care. Influenza vaccination may also reduce the likelihood that flu-related health complications might significantly worsen the severity of subsequent or concurrent illness from COVID-19. The influenza vaccine requirement will help protect not only individual students, staff and faculty, but mitigate the broader public health risk to the community.

When do students need to get the flu vaccine?

The deadline is November 1, 2020, for those who are required or wish to access UC premises, and subject to requests for exemption or accommodation. However, all members of the UC community are strongly encouraged to receive the flu vaccine.

How can students get the flu vaccine?

Students can get their flu vaccine at retail pharmacies near their campuses or homes, doctor's offices/medical clinics or at the Student Health Services clinics at all UC campuses.

What is the cost of the flu vaccine for students?

All Affordable Care Act-compliant medical insurance plans, including the UC Student Health Insurance Plan (UC SHIP), cover influenza vaccination at no cost to the individual.

How will students provide proof that they have received their flu shot?

Students should report their influenza vaccination through their Student Health Services Portals, where they also provide evidence of their other required vaccinations. Some locations may also ask about flu vaccination through screening apps used to enter UC facilities.

Does the flu vaccine requirement apply to visiting, graduate or professional school students as well?

Yes. This requirement applies to all students in graduate or undergraduate programs at UC, including visitors who are not enrolled in degree-granting programs.

Are there any changes to the student immunization policy?

No. The Executive Order creates a new flu vaccine mandate for all students, faculty and staff living, working or learning on campus on or after November 1, 2020, through the end of the flu season.

Is this a permanent change to the immunization policy? Will students be required to get the flu vaccine from now on?

No. The new requirement is based on the University's assessment of the current situation and will be revisited as the situation demands.

Will exemptions or accommodations be allowed?

Yes. The Executive Order permits approved medical exemptions or disability or religious accommodations. All requests for exemptions or accommodations will be reviewed by the campus at which the student is enrolled. Requests for medical exemption must be submitted to the medical director of Student Health Services. Requests for disability or religious accommodation will be reviewed by a designated office as assigned by the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. If for any reason you believe you should receive an exception to the vaccination requirement, please reach out to these contacts to discuss whether you may be eligible.

If a student will only participate in remote instruction this fall will they need to document immunization by the deadline?

No, but starting November 1, 2020, and through the 2020-2021 flu season, they will be required to certify they have received the flu vaccine or an exemption or accommodation (or have a request for exemption or accommodation pending) before being allowed to access UC premises.

Is there a penalty or consequence for students if they do not get a flu shot?

Those who have not received a vaccine or applied for an exemption or sought an accommodation by the deadline (or have a request for exemption or accommodation pending) will not be admitted to University facilities if classes or activities resume on site during the 2020-2021 flu season, or if they are residing in University facilities during the flu season. Those who have not received the vaccine but have received an exemption or accommodation (or have a request for exemption or accommodation pending) may be required to comply with enhanced protection requirements in order to prevent transmission any time they seek to access UC premises.

Is November 1 a firm deadline for when students must report they've received a flu vaccination or an approved exemption or accommodation?

This is a firm deadline for anyone who is currently living, learning or working on premises at a UC location. If you are currently remote but are later required or wish to access UC premises (other than as a patient) during the 2020-2021 flu season, you must first certify you have received the flu vaccine or an exemption or accommodation (or have a request for exemption or accommodation pending). Even if you continue to study remotely, everyone is encouraged to obtain the 2020-2021 vaccine consistent with CDC guidance and CDPH guidance, as well as recommendations from the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

I am afraid of getting a shot. May I opt out?

Please speak with your health care provider about your options. Many people can get vaccinated with a nasal spray rather than a shot. Fear alone is not a basis for a medical exemption or accommodation.

When will this year's flu vaccine be available?

The vaccine is available now in most locations. Anyone can get their flu vaccine at retail pharmacies near their homes or campuses, or at their doctors' offices or medical clinics. Students can also get their flu vaccines at the Student Health Services clinics at all campuses.

How will student health clinics deliver the vaccinations given the social distancing requirements that may impact the usual vaccination fairs?

Student health clinics at each campus are working in consultation with their local public health departments on plans for vaccination events. The details of the delivery of vaccinations will be finalized once it is clear how many students will be present on campuses this fall and what the local social distancing guidelines permit at each location.

What other immunizations does the University policy require of students?

The UC Immunization Policy requires incoming students to obtain the vaccinations and screening recommended for colleges and universities by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) for those diseases that can be passed on to others by respiratory transmission. These vaccines currently include: Measles, Mumps and Rubella; Varicella (chickenpox) (VZV) and tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap). In addition, the meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY) is required for students aged 21 and younger. All incoming students must also complete an online screening questionnaire for tuberculosis (TB), based upon CDPH guidance. Students training at clinical locations, day care centers, and other campus locations may be subject to additional requirements consistent with federal and state law and local public health directives.

Will UC require students to get a COVID-19 vaccine when one is developed and available?

UC looks forward to the development of a safe and effective vaccine for SARS-CoV-2. Vaccines are in development and only recently are being tested in human trials. The University is monitoring progress and may update its immunization policy, but only in consultation with the California Department of Public Health and our own internal experts, and after new vaccines are fully approved by the FDA and recommendations for use adopted by the CDC and expert professional organizations.