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Andrea Estrada

Flu Vaccine Q&A

Beginning Nov. 19, 2021, the UC Office of the President is making influenza vaccinations mandatory for all faculty, staff and students who will be working, living or learning on a UC campus anytime during the 2021-22 flu season.

The Current spoke with Dr. Vejas Skripkus, executive director of Student Health and campus physician, about why a flu shot is particularly important this season and what actions members of the campus community must take in order to comply with the UC executive order.

TC: With the UC COVID-19 vaccination policy in place, why is a flu vaccination mandate necessary as well?

VS: Routine vaccination is an essential preventative care service for children, adolescents and adults — including pregnant people — that should not be delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, reducing the overall burden of respiratory illnesses is important to protect vulnerable populations at risk for severe illness, the health care system and other critical infrastructure. We have seen documented cases of Influenza V in our UC Santa Barbara student population as early as two weeks ago, and the County of Santa Barbara has also seen cases within the broader community already. Protecting ourselves from the influenza virus with the vaccine is important for the safety and wellbeing of everyone.

TC: How do faculty and staff members indicate they are in compliance with the mandate?

VS: They are asked to log on to the Point N Click electronic health record portal using their UCSBnetID and indicate that they have received a vaccination, or that they have chosen to decline. Details and instructions are on the Student Health website. When individuals get their flu vaccinations from either their provider's office or a pharmacy or other flu vaccination outreach in the community, the information is automatically entered into the California Immunization Registry and that enables us to verify that faculty and staff members are in compliance with the mandate.

TC: What will be required of people who choose not to receive a flu vaccination?

VS: Those individuals who decline a flu vaccination will be required to wear a face mask everywhere on campus until the end of flu season, in May or June, regardless of any change in COVID-19 requirements. They also will need to adhere to any additional non-pharmaceutical interventions, physical distancing or other requirements or restrictions specified by our campus or our local public health authority.

TC: Where can people who have questions about the flu vaccination mandate get information?

VS: The UC Office of the President has developed FAQs for employees and FAQs for students, and a UCnet article provides additional information as well. Questions also can be directed to fluvaccination@sa.ucsb.edu.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.