

UW-Madison: Reports high levels of vaccination

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As the fall semester begins, UW-Madison has met and exceeded its goals for the vaccination rates of its students, faculty and staff. Efforts to increase these rates are ongoing.

- As of Sept. 1, 88 percent of students are fully vaccinated and 91 percent of students have received at least one dose, verified by either documentation of on-campus vaccination or the upload of off-campus vaccination records. The number is based on those students coming to campus for in-person learning.
- 92 percent of employees are fully vaccinated, according to campus vaccination records. Among faculty, the vaccination rate is 99 percent. The number is based on employees working on the main Madison campus.
- For residents of University Housing, 92 percent of residents are fully vaccinated and 94 percent of residents have received at least one dose, again, verified by either documentation of on-campus vaccination or the upload of off-campus vaccination records.
- 90 percent of the entire campus community is now fully vaccinated.
- UW-Madison is also fortunate to be situated within Dane County, which has a high rate of vaccination. Among all residents, including those too young to be vaccinated at this time, 69 percent are fully vaccinated.

"I'm proud of our students and employees for taking this important step to protect themselves and others. And I'm grateful to our staff, who worked tirelessly to achieve these results," says Chancellor Rebecca Blank.

“Our high level of vaccination means that we have a robust level of protection on campus and fewer members of our community will experience severe infections caused by COVID-19, compared to areas with lower vaccination rates,” she adds, noting that like any large population, campus is still likely to experience COVID-19 cases and breakthrough infections, which generally produce milder illness.

For instance, in Wisconsin, unvaccinated people are being hospitalized with COVID-19 at nearly four times the rate of people who have been fully vaccinated, since symptoms tend to be less severe in vaccinated people. In Dane County over the past four weeks, COVID-19 cases have increased by 24 percent among unvaccinated people but have remained stable among vaccinated people.

“The students at UW-Madison have demonstrated again that we have built a culture of responsibility on our campuses,” adds interim UW System President Tommy Thompson. “I applaud them for doing the right thing, and I applaud Chancellor Blank and her staff for making vaccinations of students and employees such a high priority.”

Safe and effective no-cost vaccines continue to be available through University Health Services (UHS) and UW-Madison continues to encourage anyone who hasn’t received a shot to get one as soon as possible.

The UW-Madison student vaccination rate is consistent with or higher than those reported by other Big Ten peers, many of which have vaccine mandates.

UW-Madison is achieving a high vaccination rate through a combination of beginning early with repeated messaging and visible marketing, an emphasis on data analysis and targeted outreach, and a laser-like focus on the topic from leaders across campus.

“The work by UHS, supervisors and employees to encourage and provide vaccinations has been remarkable,” notes Blank, “including translating information into multiple languages and helping employees on all shifts find ways to receive their shots.”

The new data is encouraging and a sign of how seriously the university community is taking the threat of COVID-19, says Dr. Jim Conway, a professor of pediatrics in the School of Medicine & Public Health and UW Health pediatrician who specializes in infectious disease.

“There is clearly a collective desire to return to campus and successfully navigate the academic year,” he says. “There will be challenges, but this provides some reason for optimism – thanks to strong leadership, consistent messaging, well organized public health measures, and this collective commitment to immunization.”

“Badgers have shown that they trust the science,” he adds. “I continue to hope that more members of our state will follow our lead, as it is clear that vaccines are the best tool for controlling and ultimately ending this pandemic.”

With the recent full FDA approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the return of students, vaccination numbers are likely to increase further.

“We’ve seen increased demand for no-cost vaccination on campus, particularly during the past two weeks,” says Jake Baggott, associate vice chancellor and UHS executive director. “It’s encouraging to see so many people getting the highest level of protection available against this virus – it helps you and also your friends, families, and the broader community.”

Campus is currently providing third doses to immunocompromised students and is awaiting additional direction to offer booster doses to others this fall, as directed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Students and employees who remain unvaccinated are required to participate in weekly COVID-19 testing on campus.

If you aren’t yet fully vaccinated, members of the campus and broader Dane County community can make an appointment now.