



NEVADA FACULTY ALLIANCE
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Nevada Faculty Alliance Statement on Preventive Measures for COVID-19

July 28, 2021

The Nevada Faculty Alliances (NFA) urges the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) and its colleges and universities to take strong measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 as campuses return to in-person instruction in the Fall 2021 semester in the face of the recent surge of Delta variant cases. Our shared goal is to teach in-person in a safe manner.

Widespread vaccination is the most effective and safe way to prevent serious illness and reduce transmission from all current variants of COVID-19. Over [600 universities and colleges nationally](#) are implementing mandatory vaccinations for students, faculty, and staff. At present, NSHE has said vaccines would be mandatory only after FDA full approval. Other institutions don't agree. For example, the [University of California](#) and [California State University](#) systems have issued vaccination mandates and a federal court upheld a mandatory vaccination requirement at the [University of Indiana](#). **The NFA urges a mandatory vaccination requirement for all NSHE faculty, staff, and students.**

Short of mandatory vaccination, frequent testing of non-vaccinated individuals can catch positive cases in time to prevent further spread. The [State of Nevada has now issued a requirement](#) for state employees, including NSHE faculty and staff, who do not provide proof of vaccination to be tested at least weekly. **The NFA supports frequent mandatory testing for non-vaccinated faculty, staff, and also students.** Testing may serve as an incentive for getting vaccinated, and it puts in place the infrastructure for tracking vaccinations pending to FDA full approval.

When unvaccinated individuals are present or it is unknown whether they are present, wearing facial covering can slow the spread. Masking is not the ideal solution for learning environments because masks can impede interpersonal communication including for the hearing impaired. Masking may however be necessary if a verifiable high vaccination rate cannot be achieved and transmission rates increase as they have. The [State of Nevada has now issued an indoor masking requirement](#) for indoor public places and NSHE campuses must [comply](#). However, getting vaccination rates high enough and transmission rates low enough to no longer need masking is ideal, and that will likely require vaccination mandates.

Non-pharmaceutical interventions (such as testing, masks, and social distancing) must apply to everyone on campus, as we are in close living-learning environments. The model in Clark County of an employee-only mask requirement does not make sense for NSHE. To quote our colleague [Dr. Brian Labus of the UNLV School of Public Health](#), a partial mandate will “do little to stop the spread of COVID at the county level, and even less at Clark County NSHE institutions.” Unfortunately, an honor system where only unvaccinated individuals are asked to wear masks is unlikely to work.

While required to follow federal, state, and local public health mandates, NSHE is fully empowered to make safety decisions that are more stringent. Individual NSHE institutions should be empowered to take COVID safety steps beyond any minimum requirements based on their own needs and community environment. **Faculty members must be empowered to take the necessary steps to keep themselves safe**, including ensuring masks are worn in their classrooms and laboratories if they cannot determine whether students are vaccinated.

Faculty, staff, and students persevered during the sudden transition to remote instruction in 2020 to maintain positive learning access. It would be a great shame to have to go back to remote instruction when safe and effective vaccines are available to all members of the community. **We encourage the NSHE colleges and universities to be creative about promoting vaccination on our campuses, including individual and group incentives.** Working together, we can and must beat this virus.

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The [Nevada Faculty Alliance](#) is the independent statewide association of faculty members at the colleges and universities of the [Nevada System of Higher Education](#). The NFA is affiliated with the [American Association of University Professors](#), which advocates for academic freedom, shared governance, and faculty rights. The NFA works to empower faculty to be wholly engaged in our mission to help students succeed.

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