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Administration updates vaccination policy to require proof

August 19, 2021

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Dear UTFA Colleagues,

Together we have achieved a significant victory toward protecting the health and safety of our members, students, staff, and the broader University community. The U of T Administration has just released a major update to its previous vaccination policy and announced that "[t]his September, all members of the university community – including students, staff, faculty, and librarians – will be required to provide proof of full vaccination or register in the University's rapid screening program..."

We congratulate the University Administration on taking this important step.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that while vaccines are essential tools in the fight against COVID, vaccinations alone are insufficient to prevent the spread of the Delta variant. **UTFA continues to have serious concerns about the University's reopening plans, as I explain below**.

We believe the Administration's changed approach to a vaccine mandate was prompted by the principled advocacy of UTFA, the U of T Students' Union (UTSU), and other highly engaged public health advocates on campus and beyond. We are especially grateful for all the support we have been receiving from faculty and librarians.

Our advocacy included a joint open letter (with CUPE 3902 and USW 1998) to President Gertler "urgently requesting a joint meeting" to discuss vaccines and other public health measures; UTFA's open letter to President Gertler challenging his assertion that everyone on campus would be required to be vaccinated or tested, since self-declaration without proof is demonstrably unreliable; and, a rapid reaction media campaign with national reach articulating UTFA's concerns about the University's unsafe approach to campus reopening, and in particular its untenable approach to vaccinations.

We have not yet seen details of the new policy referenced in today's memo and we understand that the Administration is awaiting guidance from the provincial government. UTFA supports a mandatory vaccination policy that requires proof of vaccination for anyone participating in in-person activities on campus. Such a policy should:

- Provide exemptions on medical or human rights grounds;
- Require unvaccinated persons to undergo regular, three times per week testing;
- Allow for alternative work arrangements for those unable to be vaccinated;
- Ensure that equity-seeking groups are not adversely affected by poor access to vaccinations or enforcement measures;
- Provide stringent privacy protections for the handling of personal information; and,
- Be revisited every three to six months.

Importantly, despite today's announcement, the minimum standards for a safe return to campus have not yet been met. Because a vaccine mandate is necessary but not sufficient to mitigate risk, a multi-layered approach to maximize the safety of the University community must be implemented. U of T continues to fall short of the minimum standards outlined in our Health and Safety Checklist for a University Reopening.

Created by public health and indoor air quality experts from Dalla Lana, the Checklist enumerates a list of specific, measurable, and accountable steps that the Administration must take to reduce the risks associated with in-person teaching, learning, and other work. These steps include verified improvements to ventilation, capacity limits in classrooms and other areas where large numbers of students congregate, and revisions to U of T's mask policy to require the wearing of multi-layer, well-fitting non-medical masks in all University buildings.

Given mounting evidence on the dangers posed by the Delta variant, the words I wrote to President Gertler a week ago are more relevant than ever:

The stakes are high. Time is limited and the COVID fourth wave is upon us. We must act with urgency. We must provide our community with a University reopening that is safe and in which we can all have confidence and trust.

Let's work together.

Sincerely,

Terezia Zorić
UTFA President

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