

California's public universities to require COVID-19 vaccine

23 April 2021, by Jocelyn Gecker



In this April 25, 2019, photo students walk past the Harriet and Charles Luckman Fine Arts Complex at the Cal State University, Los Angeles campus. Two of the nation's largest university systems say they intend to require COVID-19 vaccinations for all students, faculty and staff on University of California and California State University campuses this fall once the Food and Drug Administration gives formal approval, Thursday, April 22, 2021. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

Two of the nation's largest university systems say they intend to require COVID-19 vaccinations for all students, faculty and staff on University of California and California State University campuses this fall.

Several U.S. colleges and universities hoping to get back to normal campus life after months of online learning also have said they plan to make the vaccination mandatory. But Thursday's joint announcement from the 10-campus University of California and the 23-campus California State University is the largest of its kind in American higher education.

The CSU system in the nation's biggest four-year college system, with about 485,000 students and tens of thousands of staff, while the UC system

has more than 280,000 students.

"Together, the CSU and UC enroll and employ more than one million students and employees across 33 major university campuses, so this is the most comprehensive and consequential university plan for COVID-19 vaccines in the country," CSU Chancellor Joseph I. Castro said in the statement.

Stanford University also announced a mandate Thursday for all of its 19,000 students to be vaccinated when classes start in the fall. At the [private school](#), students who have an approved vaccination exemption for medical or religious reasons will be required to undergo regular COVID-19 testing.

The two public university systems would allow for similar exemptions.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has allowed emergency use of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, with health experts expecting formal approval of at least one of the shots by the fall. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is on pause due to concerns about blood clots.

CSU spokeswoman Toni Molle said the timing of a formal mandate will depend on when the FDA gives full authorization to one or more of the vaccines and also on discussions with labor unions. It could come before or after classes start.

"We are announcing now so that students and employees have time to receive a vaccination" by fall, when the proposed policy would take effect, she said.

The two systems have said they expect the majority of instruction and activities in fall 2021 to be in-person.



In this March 11, 2020, file photo, people wear masks while walking past Wheeler Hall on the University of California campus in Berkeley, Calif. Two of the nation's largest university systems say they intend to require COVID-19 vaccinations for all students, faculty and staff on University of California and California State University campuses this fall once the Food and Drug Administration gives formal approval, Thursday, April 22, 2021. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

restrictions in classrooms and dorms.

But some colleges are leaving the decision to students, and others believe they can't legally require vaccinations. At Virginia Tech, officials determined that they can't because the FDA has only allowed the emergency use of the vaccines.

Many schools have launched vaccination blitzes to get students immunized before they leave for the summer.

Northeastern and other colleges requiring shots believe they're on solid legal ground. It's not unusual for colleges to require students to be vaccinated for other types of diseases, and a California court last year upheld a flu shot requirement at the University of California system.

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"The planned COVID-19 [vaccine](#) requirement will further enable the campuses to be repopulated," the statement said.

The University of California said in a separate statement that it will be requiring students planning to be on its campuses in the fall to update their immunization documentation to show they received a COVID-19 vaccination or have a medical exemption.

Students or staff who fail to comply with the mandate "will be barred from in-person access" to campus programs and facilities, including campus housing, the system said.

Across the country, colleges are weighing how far they should go to ensure students get vaccinated.

Universities including Rutgers, Brown, Cornell and Northeastern recently told students they must get vaccinated before returning to campus next fall. They hope to achieve herd immunity on [campus](#), which they say would allow them to loosen spacing

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