HEALTH

UC reverses course, will require all students, faculty and staff to be vaccinated this fall

Nanette Asimov
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In an about-face, the University of California will require all students, staff and faculty to be vaccinated against the coronavirus this fall, even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the vaccines only for emergency use.

UC President Michael Drake “does plan to move forward with the vaccine mandate,” Regent Eloy Oritz Oakley told The Chronicle.

The decision reverses a proposed policy UC announced in April to require vaccinations only after the FDA fully approves at least one of the three vaccines now being administered to Americans under emergency authorization. It’s not clear when the FDA will give full approval.
Instead of enacting that policy, UC consulted faculty and student health directors, who expressed “strong support” for a way to “maximize the safety of all campuses,” UC said in a statement late Monday.

In light of that, and because the FDA is expected to fully approve the vaccines eventually, UC made vaccinations mandatory now to give everyone time to comply before the start of the fall semester, UC said.

“These vaccines have undergone and will continue to undergo the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history,” the university said.
Drake, a physician, expressed strong support in the spring for the vaccines, even as UC was proposing to hold off on requiring vaccinations for employees and students.

“Receiving a vaccine for the virus that causes COVID-19 is a key step people can take to protect themselves, their friends and family, and our campus communities while helping bring the pandemic to an end,” Drake said in April.

UC has more than 280,000 students and 227,000 faculty and staff, and expects to return to mostly in-person instruction at its 10 campuses this fall. Start dates vary throughout August and September.

UC has said it would exempt students from the vaccination requirement if they have medical or religious reasons.

Union leaders said all such requirements for staff need to be negotiated through collective bargaining rather than imposed by the university.
“Having said that, we are very pro-vaccination and have encouraged it for our members,” said Todd Stenhouse, spokesperson for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 3299. It represents health care workers, custodians, food service workers, gardeners and other employee groups.

Yet, AFSCME and the University Professional & Technical Employees union, which also represents health care workers as well as researchers and pharmacists, filed an unfair labor practice charge against UC in the fall over the university’s mandated flu vaccinations. The unions accuse UC of making it difficult for employees to receive exemptions.
Joaquin Chavez, vice president of the University Professional & Technical Employees, said the union wants to ensure that employees with immunocompromised relatives at home can be exempted from the vaccine without losing their jobs.

At least 70% of UC employees were vaccinated against the coronavirus by spring, Jamie McDole, a nurse case manager at UC Davis and the union’s president, told The Chronicle in April.

California State University officials said Monday that they still plan to wait for full FDA approval before mandating COVID vaccinations. But that could change.

“We will continue to evaluate the situation as we get closer to the fall term,” CSU spokesperson Michael Uhlenkamp told The Chronicle.

Stanford University plans to require vaccinations for its students this fall.

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well as community colleges and private universities. She's written about sexual misconduct at UC and Stanford, the precarious state of accreditation at City College of San Francisco, and what happens when the UC Berkeley student government discovers a gay rights opponent in its midst. She has exposed a private art college where students rack up massive levels of debt (one student's topped $400k), and covered audits peering into UC finances, education lawsuits and countless student protests. But writing about higher education also means getting a look at the brainy creations of students and faculty: Robotic suits that help paralyzed people walk. Online collections of folk songs going back hundreds of years. And innovations touching on everything from virtual reality to baseball.

Nanette served as health editor during the first six months of the coronavirus pandemic, which quickly ended her brief tenure as interim investigations editor.

Previously, Nanette covered K-12 education. Her stories led to changes in charter school laws, prompted a ban on Scientology in California public schools, and exposed cheating and censorship in testing.

A past president of the Society of Professional Journalists' Northern California chapter, Nanette has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. She speaks English and Spanish.
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