

To: Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy

From: Brandi Hephner LaBanc, John McCarthy, & Tricia Serio, on behalf of the Implementation Team

Subject: Recommendation from Implementation Team about Mask Mandate

Date: March 2, 2022

The core Implementation Team met on Tuesday, March 1, to discuss the campus's mandatory masking policy. All members of the core Team were present: Hephner LaBanc, McCarthy, Serio, Burney, Mangels, Barr, Kennedy, Hescocock, Malone, and Brady.

The Team unanimously recommends that the campus cease requiring masking in most indoor settings. In conformity with CDC and state guidance, masking would still be required: aboard public transportation (including PVTA buses); in healthcare facilities (including UHS and CPH), and in childcare facilities. Masks will be recommended for individuals [at high risk for severe illness](#) and for those who are unvaccinated. Of course, anyone who wants to wear a mask is free to do so, but employees will not be permitted to require masks for visitors to their work areas or in classrooms. We will adopt a "masks welcome" approach across campus and should not focus on enforcement of mask wearing, but instead encourage personal responsibility and agency. The team also acknowledges that COVID-19 presents a fluid public health situation, and so we may need to require masks in the future if guidance changes.

Recommended Roll-out

The recommended policy change would go into effect at 8AM on Wednesday, March 9. At 1PM on the previous day (Tuesday, March 8), there will be an all-hands Implementation Team meeting to review this recommendation with the three official shared-governance bodies. After that meeting, assuming that the recommendation stands, a notification will go to the leadership of the campus unions, followed within an hour or so by notification to the campus as a whole. The campus-wide notification will come from the PHPC, as have other such notifications in the past.

Rationale

Throughout the pandemic we have made our decisions based on the science, with particular attention to federal and state guidelines as well as local conditions and the unique aspects of communal life on a large residential campus. On February 25th, the CDC released new guidance on face coverings. UMass is located in Hampshire County, which is classified by the CDC as Medium risk. The CDC guidance for Medium risk areas does not require indoor masking, but does include this recommendation: "If you are [at high risk for severe illness](#), talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions." Our repeated appeals to CDC guidance in the past make it difficult for us to justify deviating from their new guidance on face coverings.

Our campus has an extremely high vaccination and booster rate – much higher than the state as a whole. UMass positive cases have been decreasing steadily since the beginning of the semester, and the vast majority of the cases experience mild to no symptoms: