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DATE: March 1, 2023

TO: NMSU system faculty, staff, students, and administrators

FROM: Chancellor Dan E. Arvizu 

SUBJECT: Updates to NMSU COVID-19 vaccine requirements

In the nearly three years since our university system went into stay-at-home operations as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continually relied on the latest scientific data, guidance from key experts within our NMSU community and around the globe, and input from all kinds of stakeholders to make our decisions about how to respond to this public health threat. We pivoted our learning and operations largely online for a time, and we implemented thoughtful and nimble policies regarding mask-wearing, health and safety practices, and vaccination against this disease – all with expert guidance.

According to most experts, the COVID-19 pandemic has now reached an endemic stage, meaning the disease spreads in a community at a normal and expected pace and is more stable and manageable. As a result, federal and state emergency orders will soon be ending. The Biden administration [recently announced](#) that the federal public health emergency will expire May 11, signaling a new phase in the nation's response to COVID-19, and New Mexico's Higher Education Department no longer requires us to report cases of this disease.

Our requirement that all students and employees in the NMSU system be fully vaccinated with a primary series of an approved vaccine has served us well. It has been an important tool for protecting our people and the communities where we live. However, the effectiveness of the primary series on its own waned significantly in the last year due to the evolution of new viral variants. We strongly encourage everyone to stay up to date with the latest COVID-19 boosters, which are effective in reducing the severity of the disease, but our requirement of the primary series of vaccines as a condition of employment or enrollment in the NMSU system is no longer suitable.

As a result, I'm announcing the following changes to our COVID-19 related policies, effective today:

- Individuals with a hire date of March 1, 2023, or later are no longer required to provide proof of vaccination or apply for an exemption.
- Students enrolling in classes beginning in the Summer 2023 session or later are no longer required to provide proof of vaccination or apply for an exemption.
- Students and employees are no longer required to report their positive COVID-19 cases through our online portal.

- Students living on campus should continue to report positive COVID-19 test results to residence life staff.
- Students living in campus residence halls will no longer be required to move to an isolation room following a positive test – however voluntarily moving to an isolation room is still an option for students who wish to do so, and isolation units will remain available if not already occupied. Otherwise, residence hall occupants should isolate in place, consistent with [current CDC guidelines](#).
- Students living in apartments and houses should still isolate in place, consistent with [current CDC guidelines](#).
- Decisions by members of the campus community about returning to class or work following a COVID-19 infection should follow [current CDC guidelines](#).
- Masks are welcomed and encouraged for those who need or choose to wear them on campuses or sites.
- Health care or other specialized settings such as clinical education environments may have stricter requirements for vaccination or mask-wearing, which may apply to students or employees in those settings.

We are working to update the guidance on our websites and in our handbooks and policy manuals to reflect the end of the vaccine and reporting requirements. This will take some time, and we appreciate your patience. If you have questions about information you find online, please send them to covid19@nmsu.edu.

Many NMSU websites outside of our main COVID-19 informational site, now.nmsu.edu, contain information about our policies or links to information on our NMSU Now site that must be updated. The NMSU Now site itself will soon be archived and unavailable to the public. **Please prioritize reviewing your departmental and college websites, email signatures, and other communication channels to remove outdated content.**

In the coming days, we'll provide more details, as well as a link to the area of our website where information that remains relevant about our COVID-19 response in the long term can be found. We'll also work to address some of the questions that come up as we work to update our policies. We ask for your patience during this process, and encourage you to reach out to covid19@nmsu.edu if you're unsure about how these changes apply to you.

Thank you all for the contributions you have made to keeping our community as healthy and safe as possible during this global emergency. As we enter the next chapter, I hope you'll stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccine boosters and continue to build on everything we have learned during this pandemic about how to be nimble, responsive and collaborative – not only in a time of crisis, but in our work every day to serve our students and our communities.

An additional thank you to the many staff and faculty members who served on the COVID-19 Central Administration Response Team, the COVID-19 Strategic Support Team, the COVID-19 Pandemic Action Team, and various Tiger Teams. Without the widespread engagement and expertise you shared, we wouldn't have done as well as we did in managing this pandemic and keeping NMSU strong.