COVID-19 Vaccination

Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is essential to creating herd immunity and ending the global pandemic. The University has been working closely with the State of Rhode Island on vaccine plans as well as other aspects of the COVID-19 response that include testing, contact tracing, and quarantine/isolation.

In addition to the information provided below, a wealth of material is available on the RI Department of Health and U.S. Centers for Disease Control vaccine web pages. At the end of this document, you will also find links to helpful resources for talking with others about the importance of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Overview

All students are required to submit proof of COVID-19 vaccination students prior to the beginning of the 2021–22 academic year. All full- and part-time faculty and non-classified staff are required to provide proof of a COVID-19 vaccination by October 15, 2021. Faculty and non-classified staff who are licensed health providers are covered under the Department of Health requirement for immunization against COVID-19 (216-RICR-20-15-8), which requires health care workers to be vaccinated by October 1. Exemptions from the foregoing requirements are allowed for medical or religious reasons.

All other members of the URI community are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID-19 at the earliest opportunity. Non-classified employees are asked, though not required, to voluntarily upload their COVID-19 vaccine certificates to help create and maintain a safe and healthy work environment.

Individuals who forego the vaccine could be subject to future restrictions as deemed necessary to protect the health and safety of others.

Definitions

Accepted Vaccine. Any vaccine that was authorized for use in the United States at the time of administration.

Fully Vaccinated. Someone who has received all recommended doses of an accepted COVID-19 vaccine and more than 14 days have passed since receipt of the final dose.

Vaccine Program Management

Vaccine Eligibility

People are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination in Rhode Island if they live, work, or go to school in Rhode Island. This specifically includes university students even if their permanent home is outside Rhode Island.

There are some restrictions on receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and individuals should consult with their healthcare provider regarding any concerns related to underlying health conditions. Known considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Individuals should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine if they’ve received another vaccine (such as tetanus, MMR, etc.) in the past 14 days.
• The CDC advises waiting 90 days after monoclonal antibody or convalescent plasma treatment before receiving COVID-19 vaccine.
• Anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their illness has resolved and after they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation.

Vaccine Administration

If you are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine (as described above):

• To get vaccinated at a State-run site, please go to vaccinateRI.org or call 844-930-1779.
• Go to C19VaccineRI.org to learn how to get vaccinated through a pharmacy or through a local or regional site.

NOTE: Regardless of where you receive the vaccine, it is imperative that you keep a record of your vaccination and retain the vaccination card provided to you. Those who receive their vaccine in Rhode Island can obtain a copy of their COVID-19 vaccine record by visiting portal.ri.gov/VaccineRecord.

Vaccine Requirements

In order to participate in any on-site or in-person courses and activities, students at all URI campuses will be expected to be vaccinated by the start of the fall 2021 semester. Some programs may designate an earlier date for proof of vaccination or an exemption based on when fall semester in-person activities begin.

All URI students will need to provide proof of vaccination, or have an approved exemption, by Monday, August 16, 2021. For students who have been granted exemptions, the University retains discretion to modify housing assignments as it deems necessary to protect public health and safety.

Information about how students can submit proof of vaccination can be found on the Health Services website, including what documentation will be accepted as proof of vaccination. The process and form to request a religious or medical exemption will be provided in June 2021.

Acceptable Vaccine

URI will accept proof of any vaccine that was authorized for use in the United States at the time of administration. For vaccinations requiring two doses, students must have received both doses of the vaccine to meet the requirement. Proof of vaccination will also be required for anyone with a prior diagnosis of COVID-19.

URI will work with any international students who have not been vaccinated or may have received a vaccine that is not approved for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or the World Health Organization to ensure they have access to vaccines at URI or a local vaccination center.

Proof of Vaccination

As defined by the State of RI, official COVID-19 vaccination verification documents acceptable to the university include:

• Your COVID-19 Vaccination Record card
• A printed or digital photo of the front and back of your COVID-19 Vaccination Record card
• A printed copy or screenshot of your COVID-19 vaccination record page from Rhode Island’s Vaccine Record Lookup Portal at portal.ri.gov/VaccineRecord or equivalent record from another state
Exemptions

Faculty and staff who are not vaccinated may file a formal request for an exemption for documented medical conditions or sincerely held religious beliefs. Those granted exemptions must participate in twice per week mandatory surveillance testing and stay physically distant from others. Most importantly, those who receive exemptions will be required to quarantine or isolate should they become exposed to or test positive for COVID-19. They will be required to stay home for the duration of the isolation/quarantine time.

Submitting Vaccine Documentation

Additional information about the University’s COVID-19 vaccination requirements for students and employees and instructions for submitting documentation can be found at https://web.uri.edu/healthservices/covid-19-vaccine-information/. The portal may also be used for submitting exemption requests.

Vaccine Safety

The federal government has been working since the start of the pandemic to make a COVID-19 vaccine available as soon as possible. This accelerated timeline is unprecedented and has raised concerns for some people that safety may be sacrificed in favor of speed. However, as with all vaccines, safety is a top priority. No steps involving safety have been skipped—COVID-19 vaccines are subject to the same standards as other vaccines to make sure they are safe. COVID-19 vaccines have been tested in large clinical trials to make sure they meet safety standards. Many people were recruited to participate in these trials to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions. In addition, Rhode Island’s COVID-19 Vaccine Subcommittee, made up of epidemiologists, primary care providers, pharmacists, pediatricians, long-term care advocates, ethicists, nonprofit leaders, school leaders, faith leaders, and others, conducted an independent review of the process for evaluating the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

Effectiveness

Three COVID-19 vaccines are currently authorized for use in the United States, produced by Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines require two doses several weeks apart and are considered 95% effective when administered in accordance with their manufacturers’ recommendations. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine requires only a single dose and, while 66% effective at preventing moderate to severe disease, it is considered fully effective in preventing COVID-19–related hospitalization and death. And while no vaccine can guarantee 100% protection against the SARS CoV-2 virus, individuals who acquire an infection after receiving any of the available vaccines are likely to have a much milder course of disease.

Note that once you have received your final dose of a vaccine regimen, it typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity (protection against the virus that causes COVID-19) after vaccination. That means it’s possible a person could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and still get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection, not because the vaccine is ineffective.

IMPORTANT: These vaccines are intended to prevent you from becoming ill with COVID-19. It’s not yet known if they prevent you from contracting asymptomatic COVID-19 and/or to what extent the vaccines keep you from transmitting SARS-CoV-2 to others after you’ve been exposed. This is why it is essential that you remain vigilant about measures to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 even after being vaccinated.
Side Effects

None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19. However, vaccines can cause your immune system to respond. This is a sign that the vaccine—and your body’s immune system—is working. Based on information released about all three vaccines, we expect some people to have symptoms after vaccination. These symptoms may include fever, fatigue, headache, chills, muscle or joint pain, and soreness at the injection site which can occur following COVID-19 vaccination. These symptoms may be more noticeable than those that occur with a flu vaccine. This is completely normal and will clear up in a few days. Preliminary data suggests that these are more frequent and severe following the second dose and more so among younger persons compared to those who are older (>55 years).

Cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell are not consistent with post-vaccination symptoms, and instead may be symptoms of SARS-CoV-2 or another infection. If you have these symptoms, you must contact your healthcare provider right away.

Adverse Reactions

Although rare, some individuals can have an allergic reaction after receiving a vaccine. If you get a COVID-19 vaccine and you think you might be having a severe allergic reaction after leaving the vaccination provider site, seek immediate medical care by calling 9-1-1. Additional information about adverse reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine can be found at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/allergic-reaction.html.

If someone has a severe allergic reaction after getting vaccinated, their vaccination provider will send a report to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). VAERS is a national system that collects reports from healthcare professionals, vaccine manufacturers, and the public about adverse events that happen after vaccination.

Precautions After Vaccination

Individuals who’ve been vaccinated against COVID-19 must remain diligent in preventing further transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Despite receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, you cannot be assumed to have full, lasting immunity against reinfection. As indicated above, you remain at some risk of reinfection and of passing the virus on to others. Additionally, studies are ongoing to determine how long immunity is conveyed by the vaccine.

Preventive Measures

Like those who have recovered from COVID-19, those who have received the COVID-19 vaccine must still comply with URI’s requirements for daily Self-Screening if coming to campus. Students, faculty, and staff must not come to campus if they are ill, even if they’ve previously had COVID-19 or received the vaccine and should contact their healthcare provider right away.

Testing

Those who have received the COVID-19 vaccine do not need to participate in the University’s COVID-19 surveillance testing program. However, they should be tested for COVID-19 if symptomatic. See Self-Screening for instructions on reporting illness. Note that the vaccine cannot cause you to test positive for COVID-19 though it could potentially result in a positive test for COVID-19 antibodies.
Isolation and Quarantine

Individuals who have received their final dose of an approved COVID-19 vaccination series may be exempt from some isolation and quarantine requirements. See URI’s Isolation and Quarantine guidelines and requirements for more information.

Talking with Others About Vaccination

To ensure as many people as possible are vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2, it’s important that everyone have accurate, factual information at their disposal. When it comes to talking to others about COVID-19 vaccination, the CDC offers a number of helpful resources. The CDC’s Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine page provides a good summary of the reasons you should be vaccinated. They also offer a vaccination Frequently Asked Questions page and a Myths & Facts page. For questions specific to Rhode Island, you can also visit the RI Department of Health’s COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions document.