June 17, 2021

To Rhode Island Institutions of Higher Education:

Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) outlined recommendations and expectations for the upcoming terms in Summer and Fall 2021 Reopening Guidance.

The guidance highlights vaccination as an essential strategy to mitigate risk of COVID-19 infection and spread. Recent national and international studies have provided additional evidence of the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines:

- The vaccines we have are working in the real world. Studies show them to be more than 90% effective in preventing mild and severe disease, hospitalization, and death.
- The vaccines have proven to be effective against the SARS-CoV-2 variants currently circulating in Rhode Island and nationally. Specifically, the CDC highlighted two studies that show that the vaccines work well against the B.1.1.7 and B.1.526 variants, which are common now in Rhode Island.
- The research shows that if you are vaccinated, you’re less likely to spread the virus and the protection has lasted over time.

Federal and State governments do not require COVID-19 vaccination. However, businesses, organizations, operation, or institutions may choose to develop, adopt and/or implement protocols or policies that exceed the guidance of State executive orders and regulations in order to effectively address their specific COVID-19 outbreak management and response needs.

Vaccination is the primary preventive approach and RIDOH is supportive of Institutions of Higher Education choosing to require COVID-19 vaccination for students and/or faculty and staff to be vaccinated for in the Fall of 2021.

Sincerely,

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Director of Health