George Mason, Virginia Tech no longer requiring COVID-19 vaccinations

George Mason and Virginia Tech universities will no longer require COVID-19 vaccinations for students and staffers. Instead, vaccinations will be encouraged.

In a note to the campus community Monday, George Mason President Gregory Washington cited the percentage of the campus community that has been fully vaccinated — 93% — and a test positive rate that is "down to 2.4 percent and dropping."

Also cited: Friday's legal opinion from new Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, which claimed that the commonwealth's public universities don't have the authority to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations.

Washington also set a goal for the campus community: If test positivity remains below 4% for the next five weeks, masking rules for the university will be lifted on Friday, March 4.

"We would, however, continue to strongly encourage masking indoors and when required for isolation or quarantine, per CDC guidance," Washington wrote.

Testing would remain a requirement, he added, for students who are at higher risk for transmission — e.g., athletes, the unvaccinated and those living in residence halls.

In the meantime, Washington urged the community to stick with "the four

steps that have gotten us this far": masking, vaccinations, staying home when sick and regular testing.

"I understand the concept of personal freedom," Washington wrote. "But we must also understand the need for collective responsibility, and just because we can do something does not mean that we should."

Virginia Tech's president, Tim Sands, had [a similar message Monday for that school's community](), citing that legal opinion from Miyares. Masking and other health protocols will remain in place at Virginia Tech, but mandatory testing will be discontinued.

Both testing and vaccinations are being encouraged despite the change in policy.

"We are fortunate that our university community has a very high percentage of vaccinated faculty, staff, and students, which positions us well to maintain operations through the semester," Sands wrote.

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