

**Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer**

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February 16, 2022

Dr. Santa Ono  
President and Vice-Chancellor, University of British Columbia

Dear President Ono,

Re: UBC plan to de-register students who have not declared their COVID-19 vaccination status

Here in the Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer at Vancouver Coastal Health we have great appreciation for the collaborative partnership we have had with the leadership of the University of British Columbia (UBC) administration throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As we've noted previously, the positive ongoing relationships between public health and the university have contributed to a high level of vaccination among students, staff and faculty, and a very low incidence rate of COVID-19 cases — among the lowest community rates observed in the province.

Good public health policy means implementing restrictions that are the least intrusive available, based on scientific evidence, neither arbitrary nor discriminatory in application, of limited duration, respectful of human dignity and subject to review.

Current scientific evidence, including BC data, indicates that COVID-19 vaccination (2-doses), while effective at preventing severe illness, is not effective at preventing infection or transmission of the Omicron variant of the virus, which now accounts for almost 100% of cases in the province. Therefore there is now no material difference in likelihood that a UBC student or staff member who is vaccinated or unvaccinated may be infected and potentially infectious to others. We also know that Omicron causes less serious illness than other variants of COVID-19, which is particularly true for young people.

Today, provincial officials announced that because British Columbia has a highly vaccinated population, and thanks to dropping rates of COVID-19 and subsequent hospitalizations, it's time to ease some of the restrictions that are no longer useful in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

While we applaud UBC for its work to protect and promote the wellbeing of students, staff and faculty, we believe some of the measures in place on campus — such as ongoing mandatory rapid tests for unvaccinated students and staff, and related employment/academic sanctions — are not useful in preventing the transmission of COVID-19 on campus. Not only is Rapid Antigen Testing of asymptomatic people unreliable in identifying infection with the Omicron variant, but we have no evidence that those who have not complied with UBC policies have posed any public health risk to their fellow students, faculty or staff, even during circulation of other variants.

We understand there are now also plans being developed to de-register students who have not declared their vaccination status nor complied with mandatory testing. We strongly advise against implementing such a program.



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A new evidence review and analysis [pre-print](#) on the Social Science Research Network online repository, *The Unintended Consequences of COVID-19 Vaccine Policy: Why Mandates, Passports, and Segregated Lockdowns May Cause more Harm than Good*, by public health and infectious disease experts from around the world, looks at the harms of mandatory vaccine policies. The authors conclude that such policies “may lead to detrimental long-term impacts on uptake of future public health measures, including COVID-19 vaccines themselves as well as routine immunizations. Restricting people’s access to work, education, public transport, and social life based on COVID-19 vaccination status impinges on human rights, promotes stigma and social polarization, and adversely affects health and wellbeing.” Instead they found leveraging empowering strategies based on trust and public consultation represent a more sustainable approach for protecting those at highest risk of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality and the health and wellbeing of the public.

Universities are low-risk settings for COVID-19 and, as incidence has declined and there is now evidence of the endemic nature of the virus, they should have minimal restrictions in place at this stage of the pandemic. Based on the totality of public health evidence, it’s now appropriate to discontinue the testing program for unvaccinated students, staff and faculty; and further, we urge you not proceed with plans to de-register students who have not declared their vaccination status. Such measures may result in profound negative harms on their future health and wellbeing, by impacting future educational and career opportunities, and their mental health.

As Medical Health Officers with the responsibility for the health and well-being of the students, staff and residents of the UBC campus, we remain committed to working with UBC to continue to monitor and advise on both the epidemiology of COVID-19 and other important public health issues.

**Dr. Patricia Daly**  
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 Chief Medical Health Officer

**Dr. Mark Lysyshyn**  
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 Medical Health Officer

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 Medical Health Officer

Cc: Council of Senates, UBC  
 UBC Board of Governors  
 UBC Alma Mater Society