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Community colleges invoke vaccine requirement

BOSTON – The Presidents of the Massachusetts community colleges announced today that students, faculty, and staff at the Commonwealth’s 15 community colleges must be fully vaccinated by January 2022.

“During the last 18 months, the Massachusetts Community Colleges have prioritized the health and safety of our communities while also recognizing that many of our students have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic” the Presidents said in a statement shared with their campuses. “While a significant number of students, faculty, and staff are already vaccinated or are in the process of becoming vaccinated, the fifteen colleges are seeking to increase the health and safety of the learning and working environment in light of the ongoing public health concerns and current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The

Massachusetts Community Colleges are committed to ensuring vaccination status is not a barrier to students and will continue offering a range of virtual learning opportunities and services.”

The announcement comes amid a rise in the number of new cases of COVID-19 across the Commonwealth, the increased access and availability of vaccines, the Food & Drug Administration’s full and pending approval of available vaccines, and CDC guidance that the COVID-19 vaccine has been proven to be extremely safe and highly effective at preventing infection, severe disease, hospitalization, and death, the requirement is aimed at ensuring the safest learning and working environment possible for the more than 135,000 students served by the community colleges each year.

“The 15 community colleges across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

decided that this requirement was necessary given the changing conditions of COVID-19 and the Delta variant,” Holyoke Community College president Christina Royal said today in a message to the HCC community. “While there is no ironclad defense against coronavirus, extensive public health research has shown that vaccination greatly reduces the risk of hospitalization and death.”

All Mass. community colleges will continue to make vaccine clinics available on their campuses for students, faculty and staff.

HCC will continue to offer free COVID-19 vaccinations for the foreseeable future on its Homestead Avenue campus every Tuesday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. The college also offers COVID-19 testing six days a week on campus through the Holyoke Board of Health. Both vaccinations clinics and testing are available in Parking Lot N outside

the Bartley Center for Athletics and Recreation.

Further, the colleges are committed to ensuring vaccination status is not a barrier to students and will continue offering a range of virtual learning opportunities and services, the statement says.

Students who seek to register for courses that do not include any in-person component, and who do not plan to come on campus for any reason for the Spring 2022 semester, will not be required to provide documentation of vaccination. All employees will be required to be vaccinated.

The community colleges remain the most affordable higher education opportunity in Massachusetts and also provide flexible options for students. They also serve as critical local and statewide economic engines, training and educating the workforce through credit and noncredit offerings.