

# COVID-19

## Recommendations for September 2021



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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been influencing the student experience at Trent University since March of 2020. With access to vaccines, many of us hoped that a return to learning as normal would be possible this September; however, we now know that some restrictions will have to be in place to protect students, staff, and faculty. With the fear of a fourth wave and the spread of the contagious Delta variant of COVID-19, it is clear that Trent University must take preemptive steps to protect the learning environment they wish to provide to their students. Many students have expressed disapproval with the current Trent Forward plan, especially with the announcement of other Ontario post-secondary institutions releasing vaccination mandates for in-person classes. Students have said that the Trent Forward plan does not provide any concrete answers to questions about the fall, such as mask requirements, vaccine requirements, and remote learning accommodations. In order to best provide informed recommendations for Trent University's COVID-19 readiness plan, the Trent Central Student Association has prepared this document to outline the facts about COVID-19 transmission and provide recommendations on how to best reduce the spread.

## Vaccine Facts

### Protections

Vaccines are a common method of mitigating the impact of infectious diseases. Commonly they are used for influenza, chickenpox and were even successful in eradicating smallpox. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the medical community scrambled to create a vaccine that would help lessen the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Now, months later, many individuals across the country have been vaccinated fully against the COVID-19 vaccine. So what does the vaccine actually do? Both the Pfizer and Moderna brand vaccines are mRNA vaccines that allow your body to build up protection in the event you are infected by the COVID-19 virus. These vaccines are both very effective at preventing severe illness and hospitalization of the COVID-19 virus; Pfizer being 95% effective 1-week post-second

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vaccine, and Moderna being 94.1% effective two weeks following the second dose of vaccines.<sup>12</sup>

## Transmission

While the COVID-19 vaccines are protective against infection, the coverage is not perfect. In July of 2021, 436 cases of COVID-19 were reported at a mass gathering event in Massachusetts, although 69% of Massachusetts residents who were eligible to receive the vaccine had done so.<sup>3</sup> Of those who were infected, 74% were fully vaccinated individuals.<sup>4</sup> This event is a strong indication that while vaccines may be able to reduce transmission, they cannot be 100% preventative, and other measures must be taken to protect the Trent University community. Furthermore, upon testing the infected individuals, it was found that the delta variant was the cause of 89% of cases.<sup>5</sup> The data presented by the Centres for Disease Control has led them to recommend the use of masks in indoor spaces regardless of vaccination status.<sup>6</sup> The CDC has also suggested that vaccines are less effective against the Delta variant, and this has also been shown through studies conducted in other countries such as the UK, Canada, and Israel.<sup>7</sup> In fact, it is seen that there is the possibility of transmitting COVID-19 even if you are vaccinated due to the high viral load present when infected with the Delta variant.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Moderna COVID-19 vaccine: What you should know," Government of Canada, April 8, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/moderna.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine: What you should know," Government of Canada, May 5, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/moderna.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine M. brown et al., "Outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 Infections, Including COVID-19 Vaccine Breakthrough Infections, Associated with Large Public Gatherings — Barnstable County, Massachusetts, July 2021," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, posted July 20, 2021, [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s\\_cid=mm7031e2\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s_cid=mm7031e2_w).

<sup>4</sup> Brown et al., "COVID-19 Breakthrough Infections," July 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Brown et al., "COVID-19 Breakthrough Infections," July 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Brown et al., "COVID-19 Breakthrough Infections," July 2021.

<sup>7</sup> "Science Brief: COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, updated July 27, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/fully-vaccinated-people.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Brown et al., "COVID-19 Breakthrough Infections," July 2021.

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While much of this information is new and emerging, it is the best and most current information that is available regarding the COVID-19 vaccine that is publicly available. As more information is released and we better understand the impacts and transmission of COVID-19, our recommendations may change.

## **Ontario Rates**

In Ontario, the rate of fully vaccinated individuals aged 18-29 is only 60.5%.<sup>9</sup> This number is expected to increase as more and more individuals receive their second doses, as 72.9% of this age group has had at least one dose.<sup>10</sup> To put this in perspective, a full lecture in Wenjack should theoretically have 380 students. When applying the current rate of fully vaccinated individuals, approximately 150 students would be unvaccinated. This level of vaccinations does not account for out-of-province students or international students who may not have had access to a Health Canada approved vaccine. To continue, the Delta variant is currently responsible for the majority of cases in Ontario.<sup>11</sup> All told, we do not know the rate of fully vaccinated students that are going to return to classes in the fall, and we do not know the actual impacts of the Delta variant or other variants of concern. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to implement policies that will keep our students, faculty, and staff safe.

## **Vaccines are not uniformly effective**

Individuals who are immunocompromised are at increased risk because if they are infected with COVID-19, they are at a higher risk of severe illness and death than the average population.<sup>12</sup> This may include individuals who have undergone treatment for cancer, received an organ transplant, or take immunosuppressive medications.<sup>13</sup> For these individuals, there is also data to suggest that even if they have received two doses of an mRNA vaccine, there may be reduced effectiveness in preventing disease in

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<sup>9</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccinations Data," Government of Ontario, updated August 16, 2021, <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/data>.

<sup>10</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccinations," Ontario, August 16, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> "COVID-19 Variants," Government of Ontario, updated July 8, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-variants>.

<sup>12</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccines for Moderately to Severely Immunocompromised People," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, updated August 13, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>.

<sup>13</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccines for Immunocompromised People," CDC, August 13, 2021.

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immunocompromised folks.<sup>14</sup> In cases where vaccinated individuals become symptomatic from a COVID-19 vaccine, it is often in individuals who are immunocompromised.<sup>15</sup> The CDC has even recommended a third booster shot of an mRNA vaccine for folks who are immunocompromised to increase their resistance to COVID-19 infection.<sup>16</sup> With the spread of the delta variant and the growing concern that vaccines may not be as effective as once hoped, many immunocompromised students may be feeling nervous about returning to campus for in-person classes. Students who may not be immunocompromised themselves may have family members or children who have not been able to get vaccinated and are thus at high risk of infection. Trent University's policies regarding COVID-19 must consider our most vulnerable population and the fact that policies on campus impact the lives of the greater Peterborough community as well.

## **Recommendations**

### **Mask Mandate Until January 2022**

The Trent Central Student Association is recommending the maintenance of masking while in indoor spaces and in outdoor spaces where social distancing is not possible. It is recommended that this policy remain in place at the very least until January 2022 and then be reassessed, regardless of the provincial government's decision, unless evidence strongly suggests removing the mask mandate.

### **Masking Effectiveness**

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that is primarily spread through droplets and aerosols that spew from an individual's mouth.<sup>17</sup> Masks have proven to be an effective strategy in reducing the transmission of COVID-19 infection.<sup>18</sup> Studies have found that in households

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<sup>14</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccines," CDC, July 27, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccines for Immunocompromised People," CDC, August 13, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> "COVID-19 Vaccines for Immunocompromised People," CDC, August 13, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> "Science Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, updated May 7, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>.

<sup>18</sup> "Cloth Masks," CDC, May 7, 2021.



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where a confirmed case of COVID-19 exists, masking was 70% effective in preventing infection.<sup>19</sup> Masking has been shown to reduce the transmission of droplets up to 80%.<sup>20</sup> The CDC has cited masks being a vital strategy to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, as it is known that asymptomatic individuals can still transmit the disease.<sup>21</sup> While Trent has the current screening tool in place, this may not be as impactful regarding the spread of the disease. Unvaccinated students who pass the screening tool may still be a risk to others on campus. Therefore, the TCSA recommends that mask mandates remain in place in September 2021.

### **COVID Rates After Masks are Lifted**

COVID-19 case rates rise after restrictions are lifted. In British Columbia, mask mandates were lifted July 1, 2021; their cases started to rise and have continued to rise since the lifting of that mandate.<sup>22,23</sup> The same trend can be seen in Alberta; when restrictions (including mask mandates) are lifted, cases rise.<sup>24</sup> As one can tell from the real world and Canadian data, lifting mask mandates at the university level is likely to increase cases. It is the university's responsibility to protect its students and consider the impact rising cases will have on the surrounding community.

### **Mandatory Frequent Rapid Tests OR Full Vaccination Status**

The TCSA maintains that students should not be required to receive a vaccine as a condition of their education. It is our stance that students have the right to bodily autonomy and, therefore, the decision to receive or not receive a vaccine. It is still strongly

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Howard et al., "An evidence review of face masks against COVID-19," *PNAS* 118, no. 4 (January 2021), 2.

<sup>20</sup> "Cloth Masks," CDC, May 7, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> "Cloth Masks," CDC, May 7, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> "BC's Restart: A plan to bring us back together," Government of British Columbia, accessed August 17, 2021. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/restart>.

<sup>23</sup> "BCCDC COVID-19 Situational Report Week 30," BC Centre for Disease Control, released August 11, 2021, 2, [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID\\_sitrep/Week\\_30\\_2021\\_BC\\_COVID-19\\_Situation\\_Report.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_sitrep/Week_30_2021_BC_COVID-19_Situation_Report.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> "COVID-19 Alberta statistics," Government of Alberta, updated August 15, 2021, <https://www.alberta.ca/stats/covid-19-alberta-statistics.htm#total-cases>.

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recommended by the TCSA that all students who are able to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations do so.

With the lack of online resources available to realistically receive a quality education without attending in person classes at Trent University, the TCSA does not advocate for a mandatory vaccine requirement. Instead, students who choose not to get vaccinated should be required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 rapid test at a minimum twice a week to be allowed to attend in-person classes. In this way, immunocompromised students will be comforted knowing that the person sitting next to them in class is either fully vaccinated or has recently tested negative on a rapid COVID test.

### **Other Universities**

Many other universities in Ontario, such as Queens, Brock, University of Ottawa, Nipissing, University of Toronto, and Ontario Tech University, have instituted mandatory vaccine requirements for students returning to in-person classes. However, as has been stated, the TCSA does not recommend mandatory vaccinations for the Peterborough campus. The University of Waterloo is proposing a different system in which students are required to either be fully vaccinated or complete rapid tests to be allowed to return to campus.<sup>25</sup> The TCSA recommends a system similar to that of Waterloo where unvaccinated students must upload proof of a negative COVID-19 rapid test to be allowed to participate in in-person classes, with a follow-up procedure outlined for students who do not comply.

### **Access to Rapid Tests**

Rapid tests for Post-Secondary Institutions are available through both the provincial and federal governments. It is the recommendation of the Association that Trent also set aside funds to purchase rapid tests in the event that the supply from the provincial and federal governments becomes unavailable.

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<sup>25</sup> Vivek Goel and James W.E. Rush, "Mandatory vaccination and attestation," University of Waterloo, accessed August 17, 2021, <https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/news/mandatory-vaccination-and-attestation>.

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## **Reasonable Accommodations**

The Trent Central Student Association is calling on Trent university to provide reasonable and accessible accommodations for immunocompromised students, students who have children or immunocompromised individuals living with them, as well as students who do not pass the COVID-19 screening check before coming to campus.

## **Immunocompromised Students**

Students who are immunocompromised themselves or have people in their lives who are immunocompromised must not have their education hindered due to their medical status. Especially when many of these immunocompromised students are upper-year students who have already paid thousands of dollars to receive an education at Trent University, the university must develop a plan to make accommodations accessible to this demographic of students to mitigate the impact their health status has on their education.

## **Students Who Present Symptoms**

The COVID-19 screening tool has been a staple for many businesses, as well as the university throughout the duration of the pandemic. There is concern that once the school year starts and students feel stress from their classes, they will ignore the screening tool's recommendations. There must be a policy in place that is uniform across departments that requires professors to provide accommodations to students who do not pass the University's screening system so that students are ensured that following public health guidelines will not impact their education.

## **Conclusion**

The Trent Central Student Association recommends the above policies to best keep students, staff, faculty, and the broader Peterborough community safe during COVID-19. The data presented in this report outline current data and specialist recommendations for the COVID-19 pandemic. The Association is calling on Trent University to release a clear



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directive with the policies that will be in place when classes start in September 2022. We must all do our part to limit the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.