

## The Maverick Minute: Frequently Asked Questions

Description: For a special edition Maverick Minute, Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., responded to three frequently asked questions from students, faculty, and staff regarding the university's plans for the Fall 2021 semester.

Transcript:

Hello, I'm Jeff Gold, and thanks for being with me today.

I've recently had a number of questions from some of our faculty, students and staff about some of our planning for fall semester, so I thought I'd take a few minutes just to answer those questions, and hopefully to be reassuring.

As many of you know, as recently as several weeks ago, we sent out an all-campus message indicating that based upon changes in case transmission rates across Nebraska and particularly in the Omaha metro area, based upon the good information of the rollout of vaccines, and also from excellent data reporting, we are planning for a much more normal – or near normal – fall semester on the UNO campus.

And of course, we're all going through a process defining what new normal means, but it will be much more like a traditional campus experience for most but not all of our faculty, students and staff.

What we've seen from the fall semester is the amount of case transmission that occurs in classrooms and teaching laboratories, libraries, etcetera, is essentially zero, and indeed in the classroom and teaching labs it was actually zero in spite of just over 500 total cases we had during the semester, almost 90 percent of which were transmitted in the community.

As a result of that message there have been a number of questions, so let's just take them in order.

The first is, quote, "If I have an underlying health condition, or if I am caring for a family member who has health conditions, do I need to formally document that with HR to teach online or remotely in the fall." The answer to the question is we've had a process in place for all faculty, students, and staff and we've had it since the beginning of the fall semester over seen by Dr. Jane Meza in our health security group, specifically, if individuals wanted to come forward without having to specify which kind of health condition they may or may not have, and have a reason they will need to be teaching, or working, or studying from off-campus, our goal is to accommodate as much of that as possible, and hopefully very close to all of it. As far as what kind of what kind of documentation process would be necessary, it would simply be a matter of coming forward to confirm that there are these health conditions without specifying

what they might be, whether it's an individual member of the UNO family or it's a member of a family of any of our employees, faculty staff or students.

Second question: If I am unable to be vaccinated by fall semester, either because of lack of vaccines or because of a health condition, will I be required to teach in person. As I alluded to earlier, I don't think anybody is going to be quote "required" to teach in person, or for that matter be present in person, unless it's a job that requires in-person performance, such as environmental services, several others, campus security and things of that nature, but the answer to that question is we are not going to be requiring vaccination, at least not in the foreseeable future, and that's for a number of reasons, not the least of which that the vaccines we currently have are emergency use authorization certified, that is to say they haven't fully gone through the FDA process for long-term safety and efficacy. Secondly, it's unclear as to with emerging strains and variants and mutations of the virus, and lack of access to the vaccines, which hopefully will continue to increase over the next six months, exactly what percentage of our workforce will be able to be immunized, what percentage of our students, etcetera. Now based upon current trends, we believe by the beginning of the fall semester the state of Nebraska will be actively immunizing healthy people under the age of 65, but that transition is likely not going to occur until late spring or early summer, therefore requirements I think will be non-existent. Time will tell, there may be best practices or recommendations will roll out, but in terms of hard and fast requirements, I think not.

The last question that I want to address today is "will there be enough classrooms to reach 60 percent in-person classes if we need to maintain social distancing by the fall. And the answer is depending upon what the centers for disease requirements are – the CDC requirements. As many of you know that is actively reviewing the data on social distancing in classrooms based upon the science of transmission in the classroom environment, predominantly in the K-12 systems but also in higher education, and there are more information that's being processed right now under President Biden's task force through the CDC to continue to advise in an appropriate classroom situation, with masking, as to what the distancing should be and what safety should be\*. Rest assured to the entire UNO community, we're going to follow the very best and the very safest practices that are out there, we're going to let science be our guide, and again, we're going to follow very carefully the preferences and the safety concerns that individual faculty, students and staff may have as we move into the fall semester.

But having said that, I will tell you that I am really optimistic that the fall semester will be a new normal, but it will be a normal situation that will make our faculty, students, and staff feel comfortable being on campus. Now there are a lot of provisos, how many vaccines will be rolled out. Whether or not these new viral mutations will quote "escape" the immunizations or the previous exposure immunity that has occurred, there are so many other questions that we are going to need to answer: will we still be requiring masks, what's going to be happening to large group sessions, all of that is going to change a lot between now and when the first day of class occurs in late august. But I am optimistic that we will get back to a much more normal situation.

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\* Editor's note: This portion of the transcript was edited to reflect the latest CDC guidance for classrooms.

I look forward to taking more questions from you, please feel free to incorporate them in the upcoming town hall meetings, or if you have specific questions as a result of this communication, please feel free to send me an email, call or text.

Best wishes and thanks for giving me a few minutes.