To: UT Dallas Research Personnel
From: Dr. Joseph J. Pancrazio, Vice President for Research
Date: July 30, 2021
Subject: Mask and Vaccine Recommendations

The Office of Research has been monitoring the recent rise in COVID-19 cases in Dallas and Collin counties likely driven by the dominance of the more transmissible Delta variant. On Friday July 23rd, Dallas County officials upgraded the county's COVID-19 threat level from yellow, or “proceed carefully”, to orange, or "extreme caution," for unvaccinated people. The orange level indicates moderate community risk for COVID-19 transmission and advises people to take extra precautions.

While a significant fraction of the University research community has self-reported that they are vaccinated, there remains concern for those of us who either cannot pursue vaccination or have chosen not to do so. In addition, vaccinated members of our community may also have family members, e.g., children under the age of 12, who are not yet permitted to access to the vaccine. The probability of passing the virus between vaccinated individuals is low, but not zero. As a result, taking additional precautions will minimize the chance of any of our unvaccinated colleagues or unvaccinated family members from contracting COVID-19.

The Office of Research recommends the resumption of the use of face coverings while within public areas and laboratories at UT Dallas. This recommendation applies to all individuals regardless of whether or not they have been vaccinated. Face coverings may be removed transiently for drinking beverages in student areas however eating at student carrels is discouraged. There are no limitations for Faculty, staff, and students who are in a conference room or office alone. Currently, there are neither restrictions on conference room space use nor limitations of laboratory staff occupancy.

One of the most effective actionable steps in further preventing the spread of COVID-19 is getting vaccinated. This step is critical in limiting the spread of disease and providing resistance to variants. Vaccinations further help to prevent hospitalization if contracted, ensuring essential life-saving healthcare operations are not overwhelmed. At this time, approximately 85% of the University faculty and staff have self-reported that they have received at least one of the vaccine shots. Please reinforce the message to your students and staff about the value of being vaccinated to protect themselves, their laboratory teammates, and their families.

As a reminder to our community, COVID-19 vaccinations are free and do neither require insurance nor identification. Personnel may visit Vaccines.gov to help locate vaccine providers in our area. To the extent that you have not done so already, we recommend using our Voluntary Vaccine Reporting Form (linked here: https://veoci.com/v/p/form/kb42phdb6sct?c=131560) to help us with our ongoing campus tracing efforts.
We will maintain complete operation of our research presence on campus, and there are no additional recommendations beyond the use of face coverings indoors to offer at this time beyond common sense hygiene practices. Our research community has demonstrated resolve and commitment to safety precautions in the past. I am certain that with your support, we will continue to be successful.

Cc. Dr. Richard C. Benson, President
    Dr. Rafael Martin, Vice President and Chief of Staff