

*The message below is being sent on behalf of President Jo Allen, '80.*

To the Meredith Community,

Some of our students have written asking for clarification or justification of our COVID-related community standards, particularly our recommending the vaccine and requiring unvaccinated students to participate in regular surveillance testing. I'd like to address some of those questions as part of our ongoing commitment to keeping our community as safe as possible and trying to have as normal a year as possible.

First, nobody wants to go back to the days of shutdowns, business and school closures, visit-less days, travel warnings and restrictions, and more. As a college, Meredith's educational priority is to provide the best instruction possible and, fortunately, our faculty are able to meet that challenge regardless of instructional delivery. Nonetheless, we know the on-campus, residential experience is most suitable for the kind of diverse intersections, conversations, traditions, and relationships on which we pride ourselves.

Second, and again as an educational institution of excellence, we believe in science. We follow guidance from the CDC, WHO, federal and state leaders in health policy, epidemiology, and other sectors of science and guidance. As a result, we know the vaccines are safe, with over 350 million doses having been administered with the most intensive safety surveillance tracking in history. The move to FDA full approval is on track, given the decades of research into SARS-2 and coronavirus variants and the success of the vaccines in data-rich research.

The delta variant of the coronavirus is the most transmissible form to date, proven through the rate of escalation. Concerns about fall and winter when respiratory illnesses rise, along with the opening of schools and colleges, mean that now is the time to commit to vaccinations, masks indoors, and routine testing of the unvaccinated. We also know, frighteningly, that young adults aged 18-24 are seeing the greatest increase in the number of cases. They are also seeing the greatest increase in the number of hospitalizations. And only 36% of this age group is fully vaccinated. A huge thanks to Meredith students whose vaccination rates are closing in on 60%. That speaks volumes of how much you care about your own health, your friends' health, and the kind of on-campus experience you seek here.

Some have asked why, given the fact that even vaccinated people can get or transmit the delta variant, are we not testing everyone. Besides wearing masks indoors, as is required of all at Meredith, we know from research that those risks of infection are still small enough that ubiquitous testing is not advised, although at some point it may be. That said, anyone exhibiting any signs of the virus--whether vaccinated or not--should be tested immediately and quarantine until results of the testing are available.

Ultimately, our best strategy for having the kind of Meredith experience we all want is getting vaccinated. Mask wearing by all and routine testing of the unvaccinated reflects the CDC and NCDHHS recommendations that our best protection is a layered approach (handwashing, distancing, masks, testing, and vaccinations). I know that nobody wants to get sick or wants to get a friend or loved one sick—or wants to be part of a COVID cluster that might jeopardize our ability to stay in-person. Participating in a community means each of us doing our part to protect that community, and I thank all of you who are doing all you can to help.

Please stay well.

President Jo Allen, '80