

BREAKING: Western will require vaccines for fall quarter

University will allow exemptions available for medical, religious or personal reasons

By **Emily Bishop**

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Two students play Matkot on the lawn outside Western's communications lawn. Randhawa said he hopes the vaccine mandate will allow for more in-person campus activities and better mental well-being during fall quarter. // Photo by Gaia Crans.

Western Washington University will require COVID-19 vaccinations for students, faculty, and staff returning to campus for the 2021 school year.

The vaccine requirement will allow Western to loosen or remove restrictions that have limited in-person and on-campus living and learning experiences. Students will need to verify that they have been vaccinated unless they are claiming an exemption, President Randhawa said in an email sent to the WWU community.

“We have made vaccination an urgent priority because we believe a fully vaccinated community is the best way to protect our individual and collective health and safety,” Randhawa said.

The announcement comes several days after [Washington State University](#) and the [University of Washington](#) announced similar vaccine requirements. After the announcement from WSU on April 29, Western unexpectedly cancelled a planned Q&A forum on fall quarter, citing a rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation and need for more information.

Randhawa encouraged students to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Washington residents can find vaccine locations on the [Washington State Department of Health's website](#).

Students in Bellingham can receive the single dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine this Friday, May 7 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Viking Union Multi-Purpose Room. [Students can make a vaccine appointment here.](#)

Western will consider requests for vaccine exemption for medical, religious or personal reasons. These exemptions will be consistent with policy currently in place for the measles vaccination requirement.

Western will be sharing more information as plans are finalized and will continue to follow local, state and national health directives.

The decision was endorsed by the WWU Board of Trustees at a special meeting on Wednesday, May 5 at 4 p.m. During the meeting, Randhawa told the board that among faculty and staff surveyed, more than 80% supported a vaccine mandate.

“I want our resident community to know that the decision is not undertaken lightly. Considerable thought has gone into it,” Randhawa said.

Melynda Huskey, Western's vice president of enrollment and student services, told the board that Western expects the decision to be well received by students.

“We know that the overwhelming majority of our students are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to have the vaccine and don't expect this to be particularly controversial, particularly with reasonable exemptions for medical and religious reasons,” Huskey said.

If students are unable to get vaccinated where they currently live, Western will provide access to vaccination upon arrival to campus.

More information about the COVID-19 vaccines can be found on Western's [Vax Facts FAQ](#), the Centers for Disease Control webpages on [the benefits of vaccination](#), [key things to know](#) and [frequently asked questions about the vaccine](#).