At WNE, the health and safety of the entire Golden Bear Community are of paramount importance. With news of the increases in COVID-19 delta variant infections and mask requirements being reinstated in some areas of the country, we are writing with an update on our preparations for the fall semester.

**COVID-19 virus**
As of August 1, 2021, 72% of eligible MA residents, and 58% of Hampden County residents, have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccination. The Delta variant accounts for nearly 83% of the COVID-19 cases nationally.

The two indicators the CDC uses to determine community transmission level are: the number of new cases per 100,000 people over the past week and positivity rate -- the percentage of positive COVID-19 tests -- over the past week.

The CDC says you live in an area of substantial or high transmission if your county has 50 or more new cases per 100,000 people over the past week or an 8% positivity rate or higher.

In Hampden County, the rate of community COVID-19 transmission has gradually risen over the last few weeks, and is currently at **a Substantial Level**. We’re following this development very closely, and continue to incorporate guidance from national, state, local public health officials, and our own campus Health Services medical and faculty experts.

**Masks**
WNE continues to follow state and county requirements regarding masks. With Hampden County now entering the substantial transmission category, we are **strongly recommending facial coverings indoors** on campus for all individuals regardless of vaccination status, until transmission levels decline again. This aligns with current CDC recommendations [CDC July 27, 2021 Mask Updates] for vaccinated individuals to wear masks indoors if they are in an area of a substantial or high rate of COVID-19 transmission. We’ll continue to monitor transmission rates and use the CDC transmission tracker [COVID-19 Transmission Tracker] to inform our policy decisions.

**Vaccine Requirement**
As health experts have stated, the best way to end the pandemic is through vaccination. All WNE faculty, staff, and students must submit proof of COVID-19 vaccination or request an exemption for medical or religious concerns. Those who have already submitted their documentation, thank you!

- **Act now:** Complete the vaccine requirement by sending your COVID-19 vaccine information to covidvac@wne.edu as soon as possible. Exemptions can be requested by using the following link https://forms.office.com/r/g3zvzHsD02.
- **Still need a vaccine?** Faculty, staff and students can receive a free vaccine at https://vaxfinder.mass.gov/
• **WNE Health Services vaccine clinics:** Health Services has completed the process to acquire COVID-19 Vaccine from MA DPH. We anticipate offering regular vaccine clinics on campus in the early fall for any unvaccinated/exempted individuals who might have a change in status and need to be vaccinated. In addition, this process will allow us access to boosters, should that become a necessity for our campus community.

• As we head into the fall semester, the vaccination rate across campus will guide what level of risk the variants and COVID-19 might pose to our community. **The higher the vaccination rate, the lower the risk.** We’ll post our campus vaccination compliance on our website and share updates with you here, beginning next week. Faculty and staff cannot ask or encourage people to share personal medical information such as COVID-19 status, test results or vaccination status.

**Testing**

• Access to ongoing **COVID-19 testing**, both **rapid and PCR**, is available at Health Services.

• **Entry Testing and Weekly Surveillance Testing Guidelines** are in progress and are expected to be finalized next week.

• **Quarantine and Isolation Housing** plans have been finalized and available for all returning students, should they be needed.

**COVID-19 Updates**

• Our **COVID-19 web pages** and dashboard will be refreshed to be even easier for our community to access safety and risk mitigation information.

• **FAQs for faculty for classroom management** are in development and expected to be distributed next week.

• **International Student Guidelines** have been finalized so that we can help our international students navigate back to campus safely.

• **FAQs for Student Athletes** have also been developed to help keep our Student-Athletes safe.

The pandemic remains dynamic, and developments have the potential to happen rapidly. To assist with keeping the community informed, we’ll be sending out **weekly updates** to the campus so you know how we are remaining vigilant in following federal (CDC) and local (MA DPH or Springfield, MA) guidelines and communicating what they mean to you, our community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our community, yet we remain strong, vital, and resilient! Thank you for all that you have done to get our university through this. We are looking forward to a robust and vibrant academic year.

Please contact Health Services if you have questions or concerns about this weekly update. You can email, Healthservices@wne.edu or call, 413-782-1211.

Respectfully,

**Basil A. Stewart**
Vice President for Finance and Administration
Chair, Emergency Management Response Team (EMRT)

**Kathleen M. Noone**
Director, Health and Wellness