



To: President's Cabinet

From: Melissa Thompson, Staff Council President
Michelle Santana, Staff Council Vice President
Gina Alvarez, Staff Council Clerk

Re: Updates to University Masking Policy

Date: September 30, 2022

On September 27, 2022, Staff Council was asked by Diane Nelson to provide input on the subject of updating the current USF on-campus masking policy. It is our understanding that the President's Cabinet is looking at the possibility of updating the current USF policy due to declining COVID transmissions in San Francisco.

The Executive Board of the Staff Council requested feedback from the Staff Council on September 27, 2022. Unfortunately, due to time constraints a formal poll of staff was not possible, though, Staff Council members informally reached out to their colleagues to gain a better understanding of staff's thoughts regarding changing the masking policy. It is important to note that people have differing opinions on this topic, and we cannot speak for all staff, but can relay the general input we've received and provide a recommendation.

While some staff members indicated they were comfortable with optional (though recommended) masking because it aligns with other local and CDC mask mandates (i.e. optional masking in restaurants, elementary schools, and other indoor activities) and it may encourage those who do not want to mask to come to campus more frequently, **it is recommended that the current mask mandate continue for the remainder of the fall 2022 semester and that the Cabinet reassess prior to the beginning of the spring 2023 semester.** Additionally, should the Cabinet choose to lift the mask mandate it is recommended that this coincide with the beginning of a semester.

There were several rationales given for this (in no particular order):

- Previous years have shown that rates of COVID-19 transmission tend to rise in October and November, and once we make masking optional, it may be difficult to reinstate it if numbers rise again.
- Flu season is starting, raising vulnerability for transmission of both flu and COVID-19.
- For those staff who also teach, when they agreed to teach in-person this semester it was with the understanding that masks would be required for in-person classes.



There were other concerns regarding lifting the mask mandate that we ask the Cabinet to consider:

- While faculty and staff are currently encouraged to be fully vaccinated, including boosters when eligible, vaccination is not a requirement. Some staff members do not feel comfortable being indoors on-campus without required masking.
- Should the Cabinet choose to lift the indoor mask mandate, masking should be encouraged (especially for unvaccinated persons).
- Some staff suggested that, if masks become optional, we require proof of vaccination for staff, faculty, and students, and require visitors to show their vaccine status or acknowledge a policy that masking is strongly encouraged if you are not vaccinated.
- Some are concerned that the [long-term effects](#) on one's health of contracting COVID-19 are still largely unknown; that, according to the CDC, COVID-19 is, as of today's writing, still killing nearly [350 people a day nationwide](#) and [85%](#) of the nation is still seeing high or substantial community transmission rates.
- Some believe that a continued mask mandate would not be overly burdensome given that it has been proven that masks, if worn correctly, greatly reduce transmission of COVID-19 (a largely airborne virus).
- Some staff members who themselves have significant medical complexities and diagnosis or who live with others who do, must take extreme caution when it comes to COVID-19 and would like us to consider a continued mask mandate in order to protect our most vulnerable.
- It was also noted that continuing to wear masks on-campus aligns with the Jesuit tradition of cura personalis — care of the whole person. Cura personalis is meant to be a guiding principle that inspires USF's proactive and compassionate approach. If, indeed, USF believes that one's physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, social, environmental, and spiritual health are integral to one's success at USF an argument can be made that continuing to wear masks aligns with the Jesuit principle of one's responsibility to protect the vulnerable amongst us.

Those who are in favor of lifting the indoor mask mandate largely indicated that they believe this should be done in alignment with local and CDC guidelines, that masks should be recommended in crowded situations, and that USF should closely monitor infection rates in the community and update masking policies to reflect any increase in transmission rates.

We thank you for the opportunity for the Staff Council to provide feedback on this important decision.

Regards,

Staff Council Executive Board