

We, the members of the LGBTQ+ Committee at UW Madison, register our protest at the university's decision to end the mask mandate on the last day before spring break as a matter of equity that directly affects the groups represented by our committee [s].

WHEREAS:

–Case rates on campus and in Dane Co. are still higher than they were in fall of 2021 (even before the omicron surge), when a mask mandate was in effect [1];

–The decision to drop the campus mask mandate was made without votes or even input from significant shared governance groups;

–Roughly 7 million people in the US are immunocompromised as a result of medications (e.g., chemotherapy), while millions more have conditions such as HIV or one of more than 450 genetic disorders that compromise their immune systems [2];

–Covid infection, hospitalization, and death have affected racial and ethnic minorities in the United States more severely: per the CDC, Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native populations have between 2.4 and 3.2 times the hospitalization rates of white populations, and between 1.7 and 2.2 times the rates of death [3];

–One-way masking is useful but insufficient as a public health measure, particularly to protect the immunocompromised, given potential problems of fit and cost to find an adequately fitted mask if those provided by campus fit poorly [4];

–Children under 5 still cannot be vaccinated, and are vulnerable to transmission from both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals [5];

–In addition to the dangers posed to children under 5, the disruption to childcare posed by increased transmission has fallen disproportionately on women, who have left the workforce at a greater rate than men during the pandemic [6];

–This COVID19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the LGBTQ community [7] [8].

THEREFORE, we call on campus leadership to reinstate the mask mandate until the end of the Spring 2022 semester and thereafter according to policies elaborated by the McBurney Center and in consultation with shared governance committees representing the groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

–We also ask that the UW administration work with the McBurney Center to develop best practices to best accommodate students given the university's choice to put immunocompromised students, staff, and faculty at risk. FLAG for disability access and inclusion committee.

- [1] <https://publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus/dashboard>
- [2] <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2022/02/covid-pandemic-immunocompromised-risk-vaccines/622094/>
- [3] <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>
- [4] <https://slate.com/technology/2022/02/one-way-masking-coronavirus-protection-vulnerable.html>
- [5] <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2021/new-data-on-covid-19-transmission-by-vaccinated-individuals>
- [6] <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/01/14/some-gender-disparities-widened-in-the-u-s-workforce-during-the-pandemic/>
- [7] <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/aboutcovidcountycheck/index.html>
- [8] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178122000051>
<https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/cdc-releases-report-confirming-lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-people-at-greater-risk-of-covid-19-illness-calls-for-more-data-collection>