Dear Wesleyan Families,

The public health update message below was sent to the members of the campus community from Dr. Tom McLarney, Medical Director on October 20, 2021.

To the Wesleyan Community,

As fall comes to campus, it is a time to enjoy the more temperate climate, decreased humidity and the spectacular annual changing of the leaves for which New England is famous.

I am pleased to report that our COVID-19 prevention measures are working—we are currently reporting a single instance of the virus on our campus. Positivity rates continue to drop in Middletown and across the state. We are in a good place right now and must remain vigilant. For the latest updates, visit our COVID-19 dashboard.

The beginning of Fall also reminds us that flu season is approaching. With cooler weather imminent, more time will be spent indoors and create potential exposure to the flu virus. It is so important to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

The flu is not a bad cold. It can be characterized by high fevers, body aches that could land you in bed for many days, cough with complications that could include pneumonia, and can also cause death.

Last academic year there were minimal cases of the flu on campus—due at least in part to the wearing of masks or face coverings, increased use of hand sanitizers and the other safety precautions driven by COVID-19 protocols. That said, I do not want to reinforce the false notion that masking and hand sanitizing will be enough to keep our community healthy. To keep our campus safe during flu season, get a flu shot, wash your hands often, and if not wearing a mask, cover your mouth with the crook of your arm when coughing or sneezing.

The confluence of COVID-19 and cold, flu and allergy seasons muddy the waters when it comes to knowing whether the sniffles mean something more. Generally, allergy symptoms (sneezing and a running nose) manifest at the same time of year. However, fever, chest pain, deep chest cough, shortness of breath, and loss of taste and smell could be COVID-19 or other contagious diseases like the flu or a bad cold.

Even when using these guidelines, there is no foolproof way to distinguish between the two. If you are unsure, please stay home from work or remain in your residence and contact your health care provider.

Wesleyan requires that all students be immunized against the flu before the spring semester begins (we will consider medical and religious exemptions). We highly recommend that all faculty and staff get the flu vaccine.
All the campus flu vaccination appointments for students have been booked. Members of the Wesleyan community—students, faculty or staff—can obtain a free flu shot from most local pharmacies or their own health care provider.

Experts tell us the best time to get the flu vaccine is before the end of October. It takes about two weeks for our immune system to mount the appropriate response. This way, one is protected before the flu season picks up speed.

Flu vaccines, recommended for everyone ages six months and older, will typically have an efficacy rate of 40 to 60 percent. However, in the instances where the vaccine does not prevent one from getting the flu, that person typically has a less severe course of the virus. The flu vaccine does not cause the flu. Yes, one can experience side effects from the vaccine (achiness, low grade fever) but it is not the flu.

If someone has had a significant allergy to any of the components of the vaccine, or has experienced Guillain-Barre Syndrome following flu vaccination, they should not receive the vaccine. In many cases someone with an egg allergy can still be vaccinated. I advise those folks to consult with their health care providers.

A person can receive the flu vaccine on the same day as a COVID-19 vaccine—something to keep in mind for those who become eligible for booster shots in the coming weeks.

Be well, be safe,

Tom McLarney, MD