



November 19, 2021

One of the purposes of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) is to “promote and support the education of competent and compassionate allied health professionals who will provide the highest quality of care for their patients.” This purpose of providing the highest quality of care for patients extends to students, faculty, and staff in CAAHEP-accredited programs, especially students, faculty, and staff who are engaged in clinical experiences (including Capstone Field Internships) that bring them into contact with patients and other health professionals.

As a programmatic accrediting body of health science programs recognized as such by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), CAAHEP is committed to adopting and enforcing standards for its accredited programs that not only foster the provision of high-quality education in the health sciences, but also protect students, faculty, staff, other professionals, and patients from illness and injury. Note the following from the CAAHEP *Standards Template* (2021):

V. Fair Practices

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C. Safeguards

The health and safety of patients/clients, students, faculty, and other participants associated with the educational activities of the students must be adequately safeguarded.

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Program acknowledges the scientific findings of governmental bodies—such as the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the United States Food and Drug Administration—that the COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States are effective in preventing infections by the COVID-19 virus and lessening the deleterious health consequences from COVID-19 infections. CAAHEP also recognizes the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and do not pose a statistically significant risk of morbidity or mortality to recipients of the vaccines.

Therefore, CAAHEP strongly recommends that all students and faculty and staff in all CAAHEP-accredited programs be vaccinated, especially when clinical facilities and Capstone Field Internship sites require it in order to participate in the patient care experience and progress in their programs. Students in health care professions programs come into close contact with the public, particularly in clinical and prehospital settings. Thus, the vaccine helps protect both health care students, staff, and their patients by reducing the spread of the disease and preventing deaths. In addition, people who are unvaccinated—including students, faculty,

staff, and patients—remain the most vulnerable to COVID-19. Therefore, the CDC urges that in order to end this pandemic, all people should get vaccinated.

CAAHEP affirms that students, faculty, and staff, with appropriate exemptions required by federal and/or state law, may be exempted from receiving the COVID-19 vaccines. One category of appropriate exemptions is for students who have a qualifying disability under Titles II or III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the attendant regulations of the United States Department of Justice, or under similar state statutes and regulations. Another category of appropriate exemptions is for students who have a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance under the First or Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution, and under applicable federal statutes and regulations that protect students from unlawful discrimination on the basis of religion. Protection from religious discrimination is also provided by state laws, some of which offer protections that go beyond those of federal law.

CAAHEP also strongly recommends students and prospective students be notified in writing, with a signed statement by each student that she/he has read the notice and understands its consequences, to the effect that students who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19—regardless of the reasons for their declination of being vaccinated, and even if such declination is predicated upon a legally-cognizable disability or a sincerely held religious belief—the student may not be able to: (1) participate in an externship/practicum/Capstone Field Internship experience; (2) complete the requirements and graduate from the program; (3) sit for any licensing or certification examinations in the profession; and (4) be employed in the profession.

In addition to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, CAAHEP acknowledges adopting additional prevention practices continues to be the best defense for protection. According to the CDC, this includes:

- Wear a mask
- Stay 6 feet away from others
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces
- Wash your hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Clean and disinfect surfaces
- Monitor your health daily