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NEWS

FSU offers incentives for COVID vaccine as more than 90% of cases linked to Delta variant

Cash and other incentives now are being offered by universities across the country.

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Florida State University, which is increasingly stepping up its appeal for students to get vaccinated, is now offering incentives to move the needle.

Students who get fully vaccinated can be in line to get \$3,500 of tuition and fee assistance as well as gift cards and an iPad. One student will get the use of a luxury suite, valued at \$1,750, during a future ceremony at the Tucker Civic Center.

Such incentives are being offered across the country by universities.

Florida A&M University announced last month it was using \$1 million in federal COVID funding to provide cash incentives, laptops, iPads and other gifts students can receive if they are fully vaccinated.

Administrators at FSU and FAMU are increasingly concerned about the number of patients hospitalized locally for COVID-19, with most of them not vaccinated.

Since Gov. Ron DeSantis and the State University System's Board of Governors are taking the stand that universities cannot mandate vaccinations, the schools are taking it upon themselves to urge participation and promote masks against the more dangerous Delta variant.

A significant outbreak on campuses could lead to universities reverting to virtual instruction, limiting campus activities and curtailing the number of spectators at sports events, among other things.

FSU full vaccination rate unknown

Dr. Daniel Van Durme, senior associate dean for clinical and community affairs at FSU's College of Medicine and chief medical officer for FSU's COVID response team, said there's growing concern about the spread of the Delta variant, in which one person can infect another eight.

"More than 90% of the cases we are seeing are from the Delta variant," Van Durme said of the positive COVID tests at FSU. "Across the region, if you look at private labs like LabCorp, Quest, it's about 80% as of a couple of weeks ago."

Van Durme said the Delta variant is especially concerning for campuses, where students congregate in large groups, attend full classrooms, socialize at bars and attend sporting events.

"It doesn't mean each person will infect eight, it is an average," Van Durme said. "If you put 100 people with Delta and they're milling about the city of Tallahassee, then we might expect that they will shortly infect 800."

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And while a department chair at FSU relayed to his faculty that an unidentified survey of students indicated 11% of students had been fully vaccinated, Van Durme said it's impossible to verify.

"Quite frankly, that is frustrating for all of us. We aren't allowed to obtain that information. The reality is, we don't know," he said. "The governor has made it very clear we are not allowed to require people to disclose their vaccine status. We just don't know where we stand."

Thrasher sends clear message on COVID vaccines

FSU's offer comes one day after President John Thrasher ratcheted up his previous language of "strongly encouraging" students to get vaccinated before returning to campus.

Now, he says, it's the university's "expectation" that everyone be vaccinated for COVID-19, and students, faculty, visitors and vendors wear masks at all times inside FSU facilities, whether they are vaccinated or not.

He also expects students to stay home when sick and get tested for COVID-19 within 24 hours of experiencing symptoms.

According to Tuesday's announcement from the Division of Student Affairs, through Oct. 1:

Six students who are fully vaccinated will each get a package worth \$3,500 of tuition and fee assistance.

Four students will each get \$150 in Dining Dollars for use at any Seminole Dining location.

Four students will each get a \$150 FSU Bookstore gift card.

Two students will each get an Apple iPad Air 10.9 4th Generation, valued at \$549.

One student will get to use a luxury suite during a future FSU commencement ceremony of their choice at the Tucker Civic Center valued at \$1,750.

A drawing is Oct. 15. Any current or incoming student who receives both doses of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series (Pfizer or Moderna) or a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) is eligible.

But students must have completed the entire vaccination series by the Oct. 15 drawing.

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What's 'fully vaccinated'?

The CDC considers individuals fully vaccinated:

Two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or

Two weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine.

For more information on vaccine incentives at FSU, visit www.vaccine.fsu.edu.