



Important Update re: COVID-19

from Gil Fonger, President & CEO

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- **Further clarification needed for Phase 4 Policy/sticker:**

I have heard that there is some misunderstanding about the newly started process of having vaccinated staff put a small M sticker on their badges. **Basically, it comes down to this: we are required as an employer to create a safe work environment.** Everyone needs to wear masks around unvaccinated staff and all residents as a way to further protect those who are unvaccinated.

We all have made the choice to work in a healthcare environment, and as leaders of this organization, we are required by IDPH, CDC and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) to provide a safe and healthy workplace for all employees and residents. By providing stickers to those who are fully vaccinated, staff can easily identify with whom they may be in close contact (within 6 feet) without wearing their masks. **No one who has made the decision not to get the COVID vaccine should feel that they need to explain their decision.** It's personal and private. In turn, no one should insult, bully or tease those who are unvaccinated. We're all on the same team, but need to take precautions whenever possible.

In the past few days, staff have reached out with questions including the following FAQs:

Q—If I am fully vaccinated, do I need to wear a sticker:

A— No you do not, it is your choice, but you may then need to wear a mask and social distance during meetings unless the meeting leader has determined otherwise; social distancing will also be required during meals.

Q—I am full vaccinated. May I still choose to wear a mask during meetings and meals?

A— Of course. if we have a meeting where everyone is vaccinated but someone still chooses to wear a mask, it is okay for the rest to not wear masks.

Q—People are concerned about the wording regarding Disciplinary Action that was included on the sticker form.

A— This is standard wording used in most of our policies.

Q—I have been eating lunch with coworkers throughout the pandemic. Am I no longer allowed to do this?

A— You may eat with coworkers following the rules laid out: if all in the dining group are vaccinated, they may be in close contact. If even one is unvaccinated, then all need to be social distanced and only remove the mask while eating.

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I know how hard it is to hear this message that we still need to wear masks around unvaccinated staff and all residents when it seems the rest of the world is loosening up restrictions. And I understand many of us have “pandemic fatigue.” Again, I hope you all realize this is not about vaccine shaming or a type of bullying—those of you who know me personally should know I am not that kind of person. This is just a way for us to help determine how to provide the safest environment **at this point in time**.

As with many things related to this pandemic, regulations, policies and restrictions change constantly, so know that this is not going to be our way of life forever. Everyone at Marklund has done so well over the past 16 months at keeping our residents and staff as healthy as possible—we just want that trend to continue.

- **Positive Adjustment to Modified Temporary Absence Policy** 😊

To allow staff to return to work more quickly and easily after experiencing non-COVID virus symptoms, we have updated the Modified Temporary Absence Policy, removing requirement that the employee needs an alternative diagnosis from a physician. The change states: If the employee has a note (doctor’s note/telemedicine) with a return to work release and date that indicates that COVID has been ruled out with at least one negative test, the employee may return to work.

- **Change to face shield requirement!** 😊

IDPH states that when the county COVID positivity rate is below 5%, healthcare workers are not required to wear eye protection when providing care to residents who are **not** suspected of having COVID or actually diagnosed with the virus. **Therefore, no one needs to wear face shields anymore unless caring for a resident on droplet precaution.** If the county positivity rate goes above 5% or if one of the Marklund site’s go on outbreak status, face shields will again be required. But for now, take them off!

As always, I welcome your feedback. Feel free to fill out the new suggestion box forms—either anonymously or signed—and return them to a Culture Box at the site where you work. You may also stop by my office to discuss things, or feel free to email, call or text me.

Thank you for all you do for Marklund. Remember, this too shall pass.

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