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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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News Release

UW System moves to remove mask requirements

MADISON, Wis.—University of Wisconsin System President Tommy Thompson is working with university chancellors to begin removing current mandatory mask requirements on campus with the intent to withdraw them as soon as March 1 and no later than spring break.

Thompson said widespread vaccination on university campuses and the rapidly decreasing prevalence of COVID-19 in campus communities and across Wisconsin present favorable conditions to lift existing indoor mask requirements.

“Wisconsin has one of the fastest rates of coronavirus decline in the country,” Thompson said. “While we will continue to take prudent prevention measures when warranted, restrictions can be lifted as case counts drop. Further, vaccinations and boosters are readily available to combat the virus that is much less severe for people who take this individual responsibility to protect themselves and others.”

Thompson noted a scientific consensus is emerging that the novel coronavirus will likely be recurrent with some degree of ongoing transmission expected, possibly for several years or more. As a result, just as with other viruses, there will be times when the COVID-19 virus is more prevalent and times when it is not. However, due to vaccination and infection-induced immunity, it is expected the population will continue to build its overall immunity and the risk of severe disease will decrease.

Coronavirus vaccines and tests will still be available on campus, and students and employees can opt to wear masks if they wish, he said. Moreover, the UW System and its universities will continue to monitor COVID-19 and will adjust policies as needed if circumstances change.

“Our students have been terrific for the last two years in demonstrating a culture of responsibility,” Thompson said. “We have worked relentlessly to instill in them the need to protect themselves and those around them. Students should be able to cheer on sports teams, attend concerts and performances, and go to classes without masks when the conditions are right.”

Thompson also praised UW System faculty and staff for their work amid the coronavirus pandemic over the last two years.

“From the beginning, our faculty and staff were incredibly unified in the desire to put health and safety first while also delivering the education that students deserve and parents expect,” said Thompson. “The UW System universities have been leaders in this regard. We will continue to be, knowing that vaccinations and testing can provide great levels of safety and security for our students, employees, and university communities.”

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The University of Wisconsin System serves approximately 165,000 students. Awarding nearly 37,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. Nearly 90 percent of in-state UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree – with a median salary of more than \$66,000. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System universities also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.

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