

Implementation and Notes for University-based COVID-19 Booster Vaccinations

January 12, 2022

A video message from President Kohei Itoh:

Beginning this spring, in what for many of you will be your third dose, Keio University will begin offering COVID-19 booster vaccinations on Mita campus. This is a continuation of the 50,000-person vaccination program that we implemented last summer.

Undergraduate and graduate students, Correspondence Course students, Keio faculty, staff, part-time lecturers and researchers, family members who live together with either tenured faculty or full-time staff members, and contracted staff and employees of related companies are eligible for the booster vaccinations.

As of this time, eligibility is conditional on the participants possessing a vaccine voucher from their local municipal office, and 8 months having passed since receiving their 2nd dose of the vaccine. Accordingly, the earliest booster vaccinations will take place in the latter half of March. However, as participants must wait 8 months between their second vaccination and booster shot, this program is expected to continue until around the summer vacation, and, depending on specific circumstances, even after the planned implementation period has ended.

Students entering Keio as undergraduate or graduate school students from April and those graduating or completing their programs in March are, of course, also eligible for this program. For those interested, even after graduation, new alumni may make personal “homecomings” to Keio to receive their boosters from April onwards.

In contrast to circumstances last year, booster vaccinations are also expected to be available from municipal offices, hospitals, and clinics. You are all free to choose whether to receive your booster vaccinations from facilities close to you or at Keio. Of course, the vaccinations are optional and not a mandatory requirement.

On May 28 of last year, when I began my position as Keio University’s president, my first job was to begin preparations for the workplace vaccinations to restore campus life. We began vaccinations on June 21, just as accelerating infections began to indicate a 5th wave. During this time, I am confident that we did all we could do. In parallel with the vaccination program, we created a system of unlimited free PCR tests available at any time for those who wished to take them. We have continued this protocol to this very day.

By thoroughly enforcing measures meant to prevent infections, the university was able to hold semester-end examinations and in-person classes as originally planned. Also, since summer vacation last year, most clubs and extracurricular activities have been allowed to continue. These efforts meant that even as Tokyo and adjacent prefectures struggled throughout August with the 5th wave of COVID-19, Keio’s infection numbers actually decreased. This is a testament to the hard work of Keio’s faculty, staff, and students, and our community has still not experienced a 5th wave.

These decisive actions on extracurricular activities have paid off, with student athletes and sports teams placing first in multiple national tournaments, and incredibly fruitful activities within the cultural, artistic, and academic clubs. The Mita Festival, a gathering where students can perform and present their accomplishments, was also celebrated in the flesh, though attendance numbers were limited for everyone's safety. Keio's vaccination program also enabled many students to travel internationally to engage in study abroad programs at overseas universities.

What remains to us now is restoring the heart and core of Keio's campus life: classes. Beginning this spring, Keio University plans to hold over 90% of its courses "in person." While I say, "in person," this is not a simple return to pre-pandemic campus protocols like many would assume. While 90% of classes will allow for faculty and students to share the same room, the same space, the same time, and bask in being able to communicate their excitement and interest to one-another in a way that can only be afforded through such live interactions, we will also incorporate a variety of cutting-edge technologies and create a "new era" for class culture. Thus, by combining elements of digital classes into in-person classes, I hope Keio University can help open students' minds to appreciate both the unique aspects of in-person communication and novel opportunities afforded by incorporating technology into classroom settings. I also hope that the bonds formed through time together in classes with Keio peers will result in lifelong friendships that will enrich the lives of our students moving forward.

However, there is a hurdle standing ahead of us on this path to complete restoration of campus life this Spring. As you all know, the Omicron variant has led to a 6th wave within the Tokyo metropolitan area. While the university will prepare boosters to help offset this wave, members of Keio's community must, first and foremost, endeavor to avoid becoming "close contacts." We must wash our hands, keep our masks on whenever possible, and avoid dining in groups unnecessarily. I request your continued vigilance in these areas.

We also must recognize that infections within family households and unavoidable infections will likely take place. For me and my colleagues at Keio University, your health is of foremost priority. What then should you do if you suspect you are infected or have official confirmation? To answer this question, I would like to turn to our Vice President for Medical and Clinical Affairs and the former director of the Keio University Hospital, Professor Yuko Kitagawa.

Thank you for your time.

Professor Yuko KITAGAWA, M.D.
Provost and Vice-President for Medical Care, Keio University

My name is Yuko Kitagawa, and I oversee medical care at Keio University.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has been complying with so many restrictions and safety measures to help fight the spread of COVID-19 over the last two years.

We are currently faced with the rapid spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant, which can lead to community-acquired infections, even when proper safety measures are taken. That is to say, you should not feel guilty about testing positive for COVID-19. However, once you experience symptoms, have been diagnosed as infected, or are suspected of being infected, you must act responsibly not to infect others.

It has been reported that the Omicron variant is typically mild or asymptomatic in young and vaccinated people. But there are still many things we don't know, like how it will affect older adults. We still don't know what kind of long-term effects it may have on older and younger people alike, nor how severe it may be. I hope that as these variants become weaker and as oral medications and booster vaccinations become more widely available, this virus will eventually be like a typical seasonal flu or cold, but we are not there yet. And so, today, I would like to speak in more detail about what to do if you are experiencing symptoms, have had close contact with someone who has tested positive, or you yourself have been diagnosed as or are suspected of being infected.

It is often reported that COVID-19, particularly the Omicron variant, only results in mild symptoms. So we ask that you stay home and monitor your health if you feel anything out of the ordinary, even if you are only experiencing mild fatigue and don't have a fever. If you start to feel unwell while on campus, please contact the nearest Health Center. If you have cold-like symptoms with a fever of 37.5 degrees Celsius or higher, please be sure to consult with a nearby medical institution. If you are unable to locate a medical facility nearby, don't hesitate to get in touch with one of the hotlines or call centers operated by local governments. It is also a good idea to confirm if there is a medical institution nearby that can provide COVID-19 support and confirm the closest call center to you before you get sick.

If you develop symptoms, make sure that you do not interact with others, putting our entire community at risk. If you have tested positive or are suspected of being infected with COVID-19, please follow the guidance given by your doctor or public health center, refrain from going to work or attending classes, and be sure to contact the Keio University Health Center. If you receive permission from your doctor or public health center after medical treatment, you may once again contact the Health Center for an interview to obtain permission to return to campus. It is unacceptable to interact with others if you suspect you are infected or have tested positive for the virus. It is also unacceptable, for example, to use public transportation or to quarantine in places other than those designated by the public health center.

With the current outbreak of the Omicron variant, measures will differ slightly depending on whether you have been vaccinated and whether you have tested positive for Omicron or not. Please follow public health guidance and any specific instructions given regarding quarantine location and period, recuperation period, and other procedures to be followed before returning to work or school. If you have had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, this could mean that you have been

infected with the virus. You will need to follow public health guidance and quarantine in a designated place for a designated period of time to prevent the spread of infection. Generally, the government and public health centers are responsible for identifying those who have had close contact with a person infected with COVID-19, but if infections continue to spread, government response may slow.

At Keio University, the Infection Response Center and the Health Center are central in contact tracing to confirm those who may have been in close contact. If you have been identified by the government or Keio University as having had close contact with someone who is infected, please stop interacting with others and begin quarantining to prevent the spread of infection. Currently, the quarantine period is generally two weeks, but we ask that you follow specific instructions given by the public health center as to when this two-week period begins and what procedures should be taken once they are over.

Recently, testing has also become more convenient with readily available COVID-19 home test kits. If your test result is positive, please consult a local medical institution or consultation center. I trust that you will follow their guidance and obey the safety precautions outlined above.

Keio University is doing all that it can so that once an outbreak occurs, we can stop the spread and prevent it from becoming a cluster infection. As I just mentioned, you should not feel guilty about getting infected. However, you must report honestly and accurately on your behavior both before and after infection to the relevant departments. So be sure to be as detailed and accurate as possible when explaining when your symptoms started, in addition to any other relevant information.

While doing contact tracing, we also receive information about people who have been seen coughing or have appeared to be sick. So, I would like to remind everyone once again that you should not be hiding your symptoms or going about your day without reporting them. Remember that even if you only experience mild symptoms, there is no harm in being proactive in behaving responsibly, in the event that you do test positive for COVID-19.

Last year, Keio University offered a workplace vaccination program. Medical professionals teamed up with administrative staff from different departments to offer vaccinations to as many people as possible, as I'm sure you are aware. In addition to the safety measures that you may see on campus, there are also various departments working behind the scenes to help prevent the spread of infection. Many people were also responding to a breakout that occurred over the new year holidays.

In addition to PCR testing at the clinical laboratory of the Keio University Hospital, the university has established a clinical testing site at the School of Medicine to provide free PCR tests to anyone at Keio as part of our SocRTes (Social PCR Test) Implementation Headquarters. We have also launched a test kit that we can mail to close contacts and those who have tested positive if they cannot travel to be tested.

At Keio University, we are doing all we can to protect the health of our students, faculty, and staff, as well as their families and communities. Let me once again reiterate that each and every one of us must remain vigilant and act responsibly for the greater good of society. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we continue to fight to stop the spread of this virus.