FACTS ABOUT COVID-RELATED RISKS IN HOCKADAY’S RESIDENCE HALL

Updated March 31, 2021, in consultation with physician members of Hockaday’s Medical Advisory Group.

In light of recent questions from our community about Hockaday’s decision to continue the temporary closure of the Residence Hall through 2021, we have compiled facts about the risks to student health and well-being that are particular to Hockaday’s Residence Hall.

Based on the information below, the conclusion of our Medical Advisory Group is that nothing has changed from the factors that led us to close the Residence Hall last March and keep it closed during the current School Year. Hockaday’s prudent approach has kept our entire school community safe and allowed us to continue with mostly in-person instruction.

Boarding Student Population

We are still working with our Boarding Families to confirm their plans for next year. A maximum of 48 Boarding students will be enrolled at Hockaday in Fall 2021.

Our enrolled Boarding students for 2021-22 will range in age from 14 to 18, and they are 70% international and 30% domestic.

Vaccine and Caseload Information

Although COVID daily caseloads nationally have come down from their all-time high in January-February 2021, they are still close to where they were in July 2020 when concerns were high, and many times greater than they were when we first closed the Residence Hall last March (see https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html).

Three vaccines have Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)¹ from the FDA: Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson. None have formal FDA approval.

¹ An Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) is one of several tools the FDA is using to help make certain medical products available quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic. ... The EUA process is different than an FDA approval or clearance. Under an EUA, in an emergency, the FDA makes a product available to the public based on the best available evidence, without waiting for all the evidence that would be needed for FDA approval or clearance. When evaluating an EUA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration carefully balances the potential risks and benefits of the products based on the data currently available. EUAs are effective until the emergency declaration ends. EUAs can also be revised or revoked by the FDA at any time as the USFDA continues to evaluate the available data and patient needs during the public health emergency. (Source: https://www.fda.gov/)
• The Pfizer vaccine has EUA for people age 16 and older. Pfizer is now testing its vaccine in youth ages 12-15, and on March 31 reported preliminary results that the vaccine is safe and effective for this age group. These findings still need to be independently reviewed; Pfizer expects final results by early summer, then will seek EUA. Timing of when the vaccine (under EUA) would be available is uncertain; some reports say late summer/fall.

• The Moderna vaccine has EUA for people over age 18. Moderna is now testing in youth ages 12-17 and expects results by summer, then will seek EUA. Timing of when the vaccine (under EUA) would be available is uncertain; some reports say late summer/fall.

• Moderna is currently enrolling studies for children ages 6 months to 12 years. Results are not likely until very late 2021 or early 2022.

• The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has EUA for people age 18 and older; not currently testing in youth under age 18.

• Vaccine delivery has accelerated in recent weeks; however, we still do not expect that everyone in Hockaday’s community will be fully vaccinated by fall.

Concerns and questions about vaccines for Hockaday’s Boarding population include:

• In the U.S. vaccine availability varies widely by state, and recipients currently are not able to choose which version they get when signing up. This means it would be hard to guarantee access to the Pfizer vaccine, the only one approved for 16- and 17-year-olds, before fall.

• The majority of Boarders are international students. Access to vaccines in their home countries is uncertain, and it’s also unclear whether they can get vaccinated in the U.S. If students receive a vaccine in their home country, Hockaday would have to decide whether these meet our standards even though they have not been approved for use in the U.S. We do not have enough information about foreign-developed vaccines and how effective they might be against U.S. variants of COVID-19.

• Testing is underway for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in Upper School-age children; however, testing vaccines in children is a complex process. It is not yet clear how long it will take for these vaccines to be proven safe and effective in the pediatric population. After careful consideration of the data, the FDA may choose to issue an EUA sometime in the coming months, or it may ask for the extra time and data that would be required for the more rigorous full FDA approval process.

• We are still unsure about the efficacy of the current vaccines on the known variants, and how that may affect booster doses. Even if vaccines are approved for 12 and older, there may be additional time required to approve modifications or booster doses of the vaccines for this age group.

• Assuming they prove to be safe and receive EUA, distribution takes time. We are not confident the vaccines would be available to all of our Boarding students by the start of school.

• It may not be appropriate to require children under age 18 to be vaccinated as a condition of attending school, given that the vaccines have Emergency Use Authorization only.
Duty of Care and Student Experience

We have significant concerns about the quality of the student experience in the Residence Hall and our duty to care for our Boarders, given the increased risks of transmission in a residential setting and the safety measures that would be required.

Safety measures would need to be continued 24/7 for students in residence:

- To be safe in a residential setting, both vaccinated and unvaccinated students would need to continue safety measures (such as masking and social distancing) as long as other students, staff, and faculty they come in contact with are not fully vaccinated.
- Given the physical limitations of our Residence Hall space, this would mean limiting gatherings, dining, hallway traffic, and bathroom access.

We have even greater concerns about our ability to care for Boarding students who became ill:

- At this time, the CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people who live in a group setting be quarantined for 14 days if exposed to COVID.
- If a vaccinated boarding student was exposed to a COVID-positive person, she would need to be in quarantine for 14 days. This could happen to many boarding students at the same time. Hockaday does not have the staff or the appropriate space to support this and would not be comfortable sending students alone to a hotel.
- If a Boarding student becomes ill at any time with any COVID-like symptoms (e.g. she gets a common cold), she would need to be placed in isolation until proper testing and evaluation could be performed. This could take 48-72 hours to complete.
- Isolating teenage girls for long periods of time would be detrimental to their mental health and social-emotional well-being.

These conditions would not create the experience we should all expect for students at Hockaday and would not live up to the duty of care we have for our Boarders.