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### Despite vaccine incentives, some WKU students remain hesitant

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Students returned for the first day of classes at Western Kentucky University on Monday, Aug. 23. WKU, like all public colleges in Kentucky, has implemented an indoor mask mandate on its campus amid a national surge of COVID-19 cases driven by the delta variant.

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Even after Western Kentucky University announced it will roll out a new vaccine incentive program – complete with scholarship giveaways and cash prizes – some of the university’s students are still hesitant to get the vaccine, which won full regulatory approval Monday.

Caboni announces new vaccination incentives, outlines quarantine rules

“I did not get it, and I won’t be getting it,” Lita Lyle, a freshman from Glasgow, told the Daily News on Monday.



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All around Lyle, students buzzed about WKU’s Downing Student Union, lining up around its various dining venues as the lunch hour approached. Apart from a few students here or there seated by themselves or with a friend, the vast majority of students could be seen wearing face masks. It comes after WKU, along with every public college in Kentucky, opted to implement an indoor mask mandate on their campuses.



Asked for her opinion on masking, Lyle said she hoped one day to officially retire her mask for good, though she doesn’t have a problem wearing one at the moment.

Still, when it comes to getting the vaccine, she remains hesitant for reasons she didn’t specify.

“I have family that work in the medical field that have told me things about it,” Lyle said. “I just don’t feel comfortable getting it.”

That sense of apprehension about getting the vaccine was shared by several college students the Daily News interviewed Monday.

The first day of classes at WKU coincided with news that the U.S. had given full approval to Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine, which has been found to be 97% effective against severe COVID-19.

Just over half of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated, according to the Associated Press. Vaccinations nationwide bottomed out in July at an average of about a half-million shots per day, down from a peak of 3.4 million a day in mid-April. As the delta variant fills hospital beds, shots are on the rise again, with a million a day given Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Shortly after the FDA's approval was announced, Gov. Andy Beshear published a video statement on his YouTube account urging vaccine skeptics to get the jab.

"Anybody who is out there saying, 'I want to see a little more time. I want to see a little more study. I want to see full approval.' It just happened," Beshear said.

Full FDA authorization potentially clears the way for more companies, universities and local governments to make vaccinations mandatory, the Associated Press reported.

Currently, vaccination at WKU is "strongly encouraged" but not required for students, faculty and staff.

Asked for her thoughts on a vaccine mandate for students, Lyle said she would "very strongly protest it being required."

"We don't have to get it if we don't want to," she said.

Her friend, Morgantown senior Bonnie West, on the other hand said she had already gotten the vaccine "because I wanted to make sure my family's safe, and I want to make sure I'm safe."

That said, she doesn't think a vaccine mandate for students would go over well at WKU.

"Most of my friends don't want to get it," West said, referring to the vaccine. "It's pretty divided, honestly."

Halie Hatchell, a freshman from Lawrenceburg, said she personally doesn't mind wearing a mask, but she still isn't ready to get the vaccine.

"Give them more time to figure out the flaws," Hatchell said.

Hatchell would not support WKU requiring students to be vaccinated, she said.

"We have rights," she said. "I think it's a personal choice."

Mackenzie Pierson, a freshman of Huntley, Ill., said she'd rather go to class in-person with a mask than take all her classes online.

When it comes to getting the vaccine, however, "I was just planning on waiting a little longer," she said.

Macy Wilkerson, a Glasgow sophomore and health care worker, said she fully supports masking and vaccination.

"I think it's a great thing to do," Wilkerson said, referring to WKU's recent decision to implement an indoor mask mandate.

"The spread has really picked up with the delta variant, and I'm completely OK with wearing a mask if that's what's going to keep me and everyone else around me safe," said Wilkerson, who also has been vaccinated since January. Wilkerson said she would support requiring WKU students to get the shot and encouraged her fellow students to get it.

"There's so many young people that follow what their parents are doing. I think people need to make a decision for themselves instead of what they're being told what to do," Wilkerson said.

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