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Mike Lovell, president of Marquette University in Milwaukee, is pictured in an undated photo. Lovell is one of two vaccinated presidents of Jesuit universities who tested positive for COVID-19 and are urging school communities to get vaccinated. (CNS photo/courtesy Marquette University)



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Two fully vaccinated Jesuit university presidents who recently tested positive for COVID-19 have spoken out about their experience as an urgent reminder of the need to get vaccinated.

"This experience underscores that COVID-19 is still spreading in our communities," said Michael Lovell, president of Marquette University in Milwaukee, on Twitter in late July after experiencing mild cold-like symptoms, getting a COVID-19 test and receiving a positive test result.

He said he was taking appropriate measures to prevent spreading the virus to others, including filling out the university's online self-disclosure form and cooperating with the local health department's contact tracing efforts.

In his July 27 thread on Twitter about his experience, he said he no longer had symptoms and would be working from home and isolating for 10 days.

"My family and I are grateful for the vaccine I received this spring. Had I not been vaccinated, the outcome could have been very different," he said.

A week later, Jesuit Father Paul Fitzgerald, president of the University of San Francisco, also announced on Twitter that he had tested positive for COVID-19 and similarly said: "Had I not been vaccinated, I fear the outcome could have been very different."

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He also was isolating for 10 days while meeting virtually with university officials and cooperating with contact tracing efforts through the local health department and university to let anyone that he had been around know about their potential exposure to the virus.

The school president took the opportunity to remind students and faculty and staff members that they need to submit proof of vaccination or submit exemption documentation forms to the school and that for the fall semester all members of the university community will be required to wear face masks indoors on campus.

"My recent experience underscores how important it is that everyone in our community who is able to gets vaccinated," he said.

Lowell pointed out that the university's "Catholic, Jesuit mission and values call on us to care for each other and serve the common good" and said that is why the school is requiring students to be vaccinated for the fall and urging faculty and staff members to do so.

"The vaccines are remarkably effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death," he said.

Across the country, many U.S. colleges and universities are requiring students to be vaccinated, and some are requiring employees to also show proof of vaccination for the new school year.

A list frequently updated by The Chronicle of Higher Education shows that 664 U.S. colleges as of Aug. 6 have a COVID-19 vaccine requirement in place for students or for students and staff members. These schools are primarily in the Northeast, upper Midwest and West Coast.

Catholic colleges and universities fall into this same mix with many of them, but not all, requiring proof of vaccination from students and employees.

Of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, 17 are requiring students and staff members to show proof of vaccination; 10 are requiring this just of students; and Xavier University in Cincinnati is "strongly encouraging students and employees to receive a COVID-19 vaccine."

Students at The Catholic University of America in Washington are similarly not required to be vaccinated but instead are "strongly encouraged" to do so.