

Rutgers University Freezes Accounts of Several Non-Vaccinated Students

Some Rutgers students say they cannot enroll in online-only classes because they did not get the COVID vaccine.

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According to Rutgers University, more than 98 percent of undergrads have complied with its mandate that students upload their coronavirus vaccine card in order to return to dorms and classes this fall. But the few students who chose not to get the vaccine are now finding themselves locked out of fall classes, even classes they had planned to take online only.

Adriana Pinto, 22, is one of those students. Pinto is represented by Children’s Health Defense, the anti-vaccine group led by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. [that is already suing Rutgers](#) over its vaccine mandate, and Julio Gomez, the Scotch Plains lawyer who filed the lawsuit.

According to Gomez, Pinto decided not to get the COVID-19 vaccine. She only has one class left to graduate, Quantitative Methods for her psychology degree, which was offered to students either in person or over Zoom this fall.

On Aug. 3, she registered for the remote-only offering of the class, and assumed she was all set for the fall semester. Classes were scheduled to begin Sept. 2.

Except when Pinto later tried to log into her Rutgers account on Aug. 26, she found she was entirely blocked: She had no access to her Rutgers email; she could not access Zoom login links, or her degree requirements or past credits. Her Rutgers account had been entirely frozen, even though Pinto had already paid tuition for her final course.

Gomez and Children’s Health Defense have filed a temporary restraining order against Rutgers, demanding the school unfreeze Pinto’s account.

Rutgers confirmed this has indeed happened to some students. This is because Rutgers is only guaranteeing that full remote learning be available to students who were already

enrolled in an existing online-only program.

“A full-remote virtual option will only be available for those enrolled in our degree-granting online programs,” said Rutgers on [this COVID-19 page](#). “Unless you are enrolled in a fully online degree program at Rutgers, you cannot be assured of a fully remote/virtual option ... Registering for classes that are fully remote (synchronous/asynchronous) is not the same as being enrolled in a fully online degree-granting program.”

On March 25, Rutgers [became the first college in the nation](#) to require students get the COVID shot to return to campus. A Rutgers spokeswoman said the university’s position has not changed since the spring.

“There was no change from March. The policy always said a full-remote virtual option would only be available for those enrolled in degree-granting online programs,” said Rutgers spokeswoman Dory Devlin. “To date, 98.8 percent of our students have complied with the vaccination requirement. We continue to work with students who have not yet uploaded their vaccination information so they can gain access to university systems and classes.”

A spokeswoman for Children’s Health Defense, Rita Shreffler, said she has no idea exactly how many other Rutgers’ students have had their accounts frozen because they are not vaccinated.

But Logan Hollar is another one. Like Pinto, this Rutgers senior also does not want the vaccine and he planned to finish his senior year by taking all online-only classes.

And like Pinto, he was not enrolled in a traditional “online-only” degree program. But he told [NJ.com](#) it was his understanding Rutgers gave students a choice: Get the shot and come back to campus, or be unvaccinated and stay remote.

He chose to be unvaccinated and stay remote. Except when he tried to log on for classes on Aug. 27, he too found his account was frozen.

Read the April 13 Rutgers’ formal vaccine policy:

On April 13, Rutgers issued [this formal policy](#) outlining its COVID vaccine rules. According to Rutgers, vaccine exemptions apply to:

“A. Students whose entire course of study is entirely web-based, a fully online degree program, and/or fully remote. To qualify, the student must have no physical presence on campus.”

And

“B. Individuals participating in fully online or off-campus Continuing Education Programs.”

Pinto thought that Section A applied to her, said her lawyer.

“She read that to understand that if she took a fully remote schedule, that she would be

exempt from the vaccine policy,” said Gomez. “And I think that’s a very reasonable understanding. She did the very responsible thing by choosing to keep herself off campus for this final semester.”

Hollar similarly told [NJ.com](#) he thought that applied to him.

“When they put out the guidance in March, I was reading through all the verbiage, which was if you plan to return to campus, you need to be vaccinated,” he told the media outlet. “I figured I wouldn’t be part of that because all my classes were remote ... I assumed the emails in my inbox pertaining to (the vaccine) must apply to in-person students.”

Rutgers has until Sept. 14 to respond to the temporary restraining order that seeks to unfreeze the students’ accounts.

Gomez said he has not yet received a response from Rutgers. He has also filed a separate motion to recuse the judge assigned to the case, the Hon. Zahid Quraishi, because he lectured for one year at Rutgers Law School. Lawyers for Rutgers, the Florham Park law firm of Faegre Drinker, are fighting Gomez’ attempt to have the judge removed.

And so far, neither Hollar or Pinto will relent and just get the vaccine.

Hollar told [NJ.com](#) he now plans to transfer from Rutgers for his senior year, as he cannot sign up for any courses online and will not get the vaccine.

And Pinto will continue her legal fight: She just filed an affidavit saying she will not set foot on the Rutgers campus, said her lawyer.

“So it would seem to me there is no connection to make someone get a vaccine who is never going to be on campus. She is just looking to take her final course and be done,” said Gomez. “We have no idea how many students are in this boat, where they believed they were exempt (from the vaccine requirement) if they signed up for a fully remote semester. But I suspect there are more students like Adriana out there.”

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