



BACKGROUND:

After the CDC changed their metrics, many institutions of higher education (IHEs) abruptly ended key mitigation policies needed by disabled people at high risk of COVID-19 complications to have equal opportunities. 26% of US adults are disabled¹ and that number will continue to grow without protections in place.

METHODS

We analyzed 141 IHE's COVID-19 policies in 4 categories: mask, test, vaccine, and hybrid access

1. Primary analysis of publicly available campus policies as of April 30, 2022
 2. COVID Policy Evaluation Form (n=243)
- Responses from students, faculty, and staff at IHEs
- Data Analysis
- Compared IHE policies to evidence-based COVID mitigation best practices
 - Hybrid access and policy bans coded from policy evaluation form responses

FINDINGS

- 64.5% of IHEs had no mask requirement
- Of the 35.5% of schools that required masks, only 12.1% required surgical or better
- 48.2% of schools sampled either banned or discouraged people from requiring masks
- 10.6% of students reported access to bi-modal hybrid learning
- 44.2% of respondents reported their school prohibited or discouraged providing hybrid access

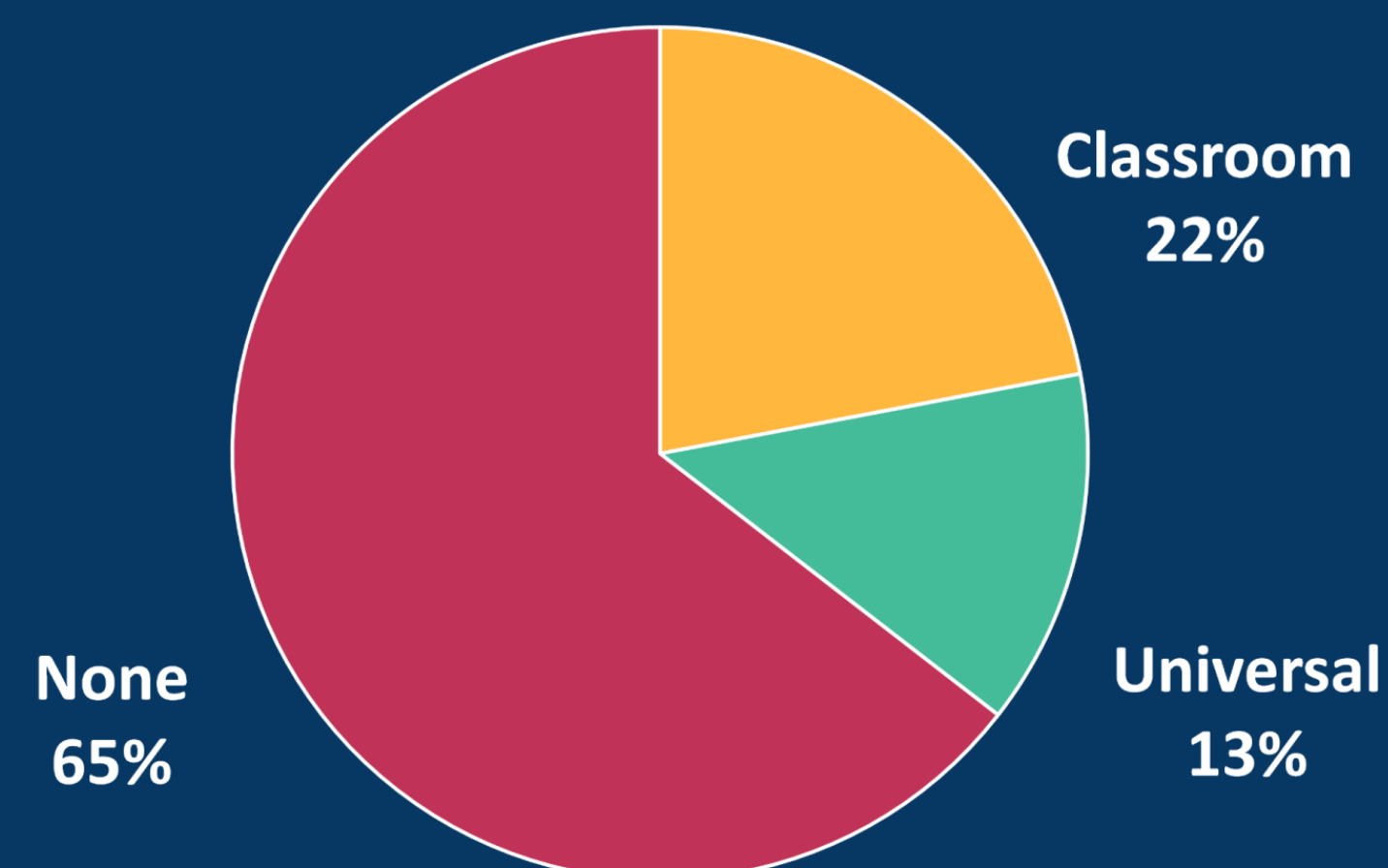
REFERENCES

1. National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. (n.d.) Disability impacts all of us. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/documents/disabilities_impacts_all_of_us.pdf

COVID Mitigation is Disability Access.

Out of 141 higher education institutions analyzed, **none** achieved the most protective standards of COVID-19 mitigation policies needed to **make campus safe and accessible for disabled students.**

Campus mask requirements

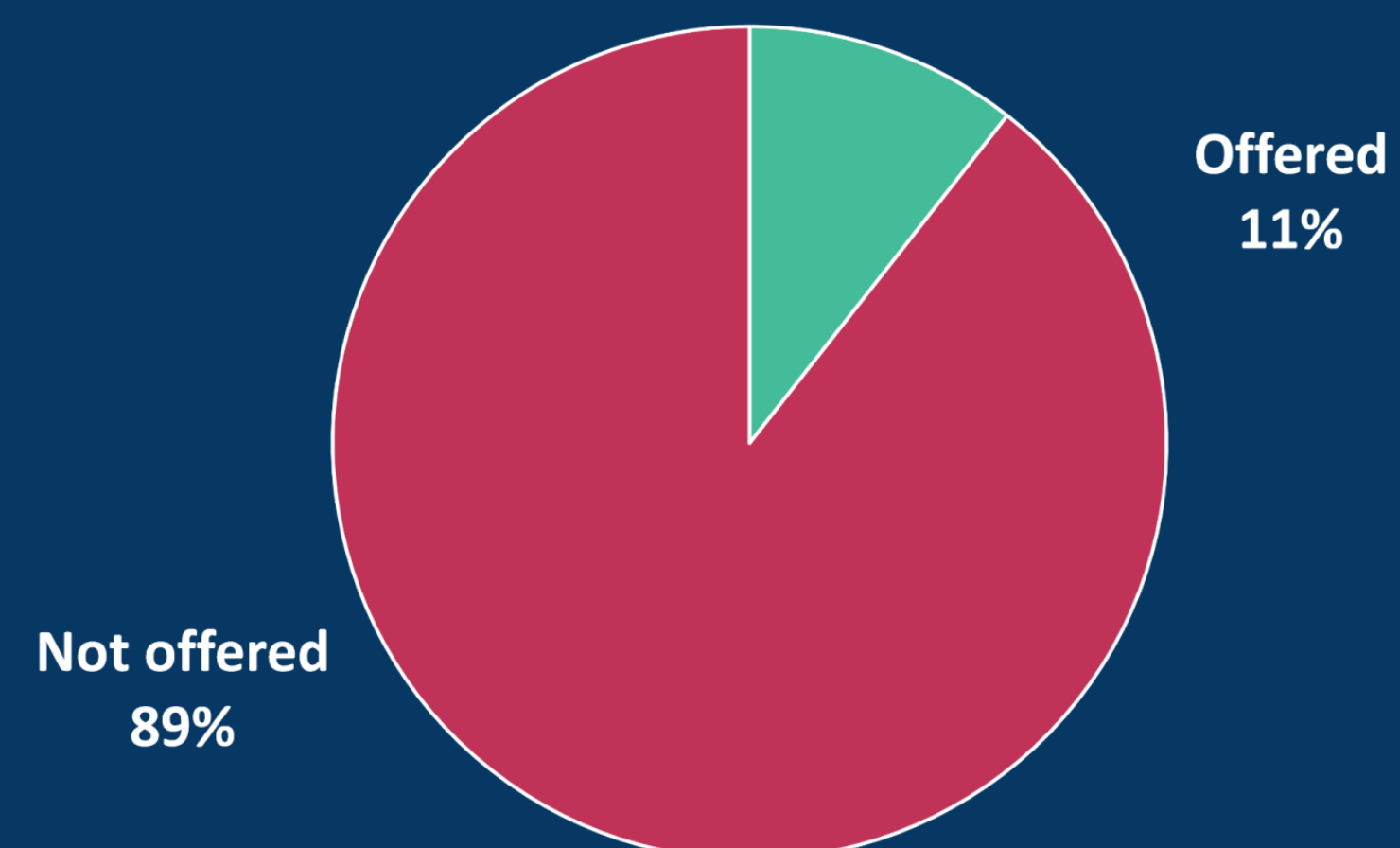


48.2% of all schools we received reports on either banned or discouraged people from requiring masks

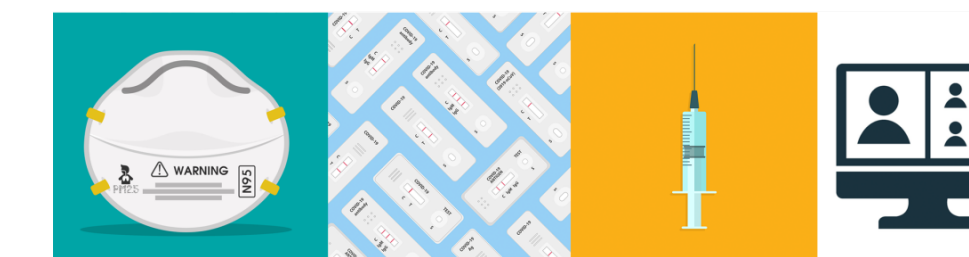


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Student-reported bi-modal hybrid



42.2% of respondents reported that their school banned or discouraged providing hybrid access



DISCUSSION

Over-reliance on vaccines without sufficient non-pharmaceutical interventions, as is the case for most schools, does not create collective access. Instead it:

- Limits access to education, by extension limiting access to employment opportunity
- Aggregates economic justice issues
- Creates living instability for students forced into leave of absence
- Contributes to the burden of disease

Many students with accommodations are still denied hybrid access. Formal disability services processes are not equitable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Multi-layered approach to COVID-19:
 - Indoor mask requirements
 - Weekly surveillance testing
 - Booster requirements
 - Bi-modal hybrid learning
- Invest in support for hybrid learning
- Simplify the accommodations process
- Expand hybrid access to all

CONCLUSION

IHE's COVID mitigation is a key component of disability accessibility commonly neglected at IHEs. Academic institutions must invest in collective access and care through strengthening COVID mitigation and accessibility strategies.

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