

April 19, 2021

Dear AUB Community,

We are pleased to share the news that on Friday April 16, 2021, AUB led a consortium of four university medical centers in Beirut who signed an agreement with the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), in the presence of the representative of Pfizer Inc., to obtain 320,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses to be administered to students, faculty, and staff of the universities and their medical centers. The agreement means that in-person academic life on the AUB campus is on course to resume at the beginning of the fall term 2021. AUB's portion of the agreement indicates that we will also be vaccinating additional members of our community, including those family members of faculty and staff who are eligible for vaccination and are on the HIP plan.

AUB has been at the forefront of discussions with Pfizer and other pharmaceutical companies in the US since effective vaccines first emerged at the end of 2020 and we have simultaneously been building support for this purpose in a very challenging economic environment. Meanwhile, the AUB Medical Center has done an outstanding job administering more than 33,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to date and performing as the most prolific and efficient vaccination center in Lebanon, rightly praised by the public for the smooth and well-ordered service it has provided. More than 14,000 patients have received their second Pfizer dose at AUBMC, which reduces their risk of severe disease to almost zero by the CDC definition.

The memorandum signed on April 16 stipulates that all vaccinations will be registered through the official government vaccination platform. The memorandum also undertakes the provision of vaccines for underserved communities throughout Lebanon, in line with a target that we and the Minister of Public Health announced on February 14, 2021 to vaccinate 80% of all residents of Lebanon during the calendar year in order to contain COVID-19 through herd immunity.

Vaccinations of unvaccinated AUB faculty, staff, and students, and family members with HIP policies are scheduled to start in July. Other universities and academic medical centers involved in the agreement are the Université Saint-Joseph, the Lebanese American University, and the St. George Hospital University Medical Center. Recipients of the vaccines also include the Lebanese University and three other private non-profit universities, all of which should be able to resume physical classes in the fall.

Our sincere thanks go to the minister of public health, Dr. Hamad Hassan, and his team, particularly his principal advisor Dr. Mohamad Haidar and Dr. Abed Al Rahman Bizri, Chair of the National COVID-19 Response Committee, both AUB faculty members. All are indebted to Mr. Georges Adwan, chair of the Administration and Justice Parliamentary Committee; and to Dr. Assem Araji, chair of the Parliamentary Health Committee for their advocacy and stewardship of this process. We also wish to acknowledge our colleagues at USJ, LAU, and St. George HUMC for their collaboration on this major accomplishment, one that will have a substantial impact on the return of Lebanon's vibrant university life. The AUB community and I are grateful to AUBMC Director Joseph Otayek, our Legal Counsel Randa Abousleiman, and Interim Dean of the Faculty of Medicine Ghazi Zaatari for their leadership roles in securing the vaccines. It will take the combined efforts of each one of us to help restore a semblance of healthy normalcy and provide hope for better days with deeds and with purpose. AUB has a long history of demonstrating leadership in times such as the ones we are currently experiencing, and we are committed to extending that leadership into the foreseeable future.

Best regards,

Fadlo R. Khuri, MD
President