

## **Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Community COVID-19 Guidance**

Currently, levels of COVID-19 immunity in the population are high due to vaccination and COVID-19 infections. As a result, many people have protection from severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. At the same time, we still have many people vulnerable to severe COVID-19 including the unvaccinated, children younger than 5 who are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, immunocompromised people, and people with health conditions that put them at high risk for severe COVID-19<sup>1</sup>. It is also acknowledged that many families have a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated members, which complicates decision making. This document provides updated recommendations for the public to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community. This guidance is **NOT** intended for use in schools, childcare facilities, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), healthcare settings, intermediate care facilities (ICF), community residence facilities (CRF), correctional facilities, or homeless shelters. For guidance specific to these settings, visit [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

### **Definitions:**

**COVID-19 community levels-** a new tool created by the CDC to help communities and individuals decide what prevention steps to take based on the COVID-19 level in their area. There are 3 levels: **LOW, MEDIUM, and HIGH**. When COVID-19 community levels are **LOW**, the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19 is lower for everyone. To look up current COVID-19 community levels for DC and other areas of the U.S., see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html).

**Immunocompromised:** Someone who has a weakened immune system due to a medical condition or from taking medications that suppress the immune system. This includes but is not limited to: people on chemotherapy, people with blood cancers like leukemia, people who have had an organ transplant or stem cell transplant, and people on dialysis.

**Up to date on COVID-19 vaccine:** A person is considered up to date after they have received all recommended doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, including booster doses as applicable.

- This includes:
  - Unboosted people 12 and older who completed their primary vaccine series:
    - Less than 5 months ago (for the mRNA vaccines: Pfizer or Moderna)
    - Less than 2 months ago (for the J&J vaccine)
  - Children age 5 to 11 who have completed a primary vaccine series but are not yet eligible for a booster dose
- For detailed information about staying up to date on your COVID-19 vaccine, see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html).

### **How COVID-19 spreads:**

- The main way COVID-19 spreads is from person-to-person when an infected person breathes out droplets and particles that contain the virus.
  - Some ways people can become sick with COVID-19:
    - breathing in infected air,
    - being splashed or sprayed in their eyes, nose, or mouth with infectious droplets (e.g., from a cough)
    - touching their eyes, nose or mouths with hands that have the virus on them.
- People who are 6 feet or closer to an infected person are most likely to get sick.
- COVID-19 can also spread from environmental surfaces, but this is uncommon.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Guidance for People at Higher Risk for Severe COVID-19* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

## How to protect yourself and others

- DC Health recommends a risk-based approach when choosing which COVID-19 prevention measures to use. Some recommendations vary based upon the current COVID-19 Community Level (see page 1).
- People who are unvaccinated (including all children under 5), partially vaccinated, not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine, or immunocompromised remain at higher risk for catching COVID-19 and need to take more precautions than people who are up to date on the vaccine.
- People with health conditions that place them at high risk for severe COVID-19 also should continue taking more precautions to prevent COVID-19. Additional precautions should be taken by people who live with or visit with these individuals.

## COVID-19 vaccination

- Vaccination is the most important public health intervention to protect yourself and others.
- COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death.
- The vaccine is widely available and free.
- Everyone 5 and older is currently eligible to be vaccinated. Everyone 12 and older is eligible for a booster dose.
- Get vaccinated and stay **up to date** on your COVID-19 vaccine.
- A person who is up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine has much lower risk during all activities when compared to those who are unvaccinated or not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine.
- For more information, see
  - *Stay Up to Date with Your Vaccines* at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html)
  - *COVID-19 Booster Shots* at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html?s\\_cid=11706:cdc%20covid%20booster:sem.ga:p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY22](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html?s_cid=11706:cdc%20covid%20booster:sem.ga:p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY22)
  - Find out more about getting the COVID-19 vaccine or booster shot in DC at [coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine).

## Stay home when sick.

- Be alert for symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms of COVID-19 include: fever (subjective or 100.4° F), chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

## Ventilation

- Keep indoor spaces well ventilated. Bring in fresh air by opening windows or doors as much as possible.
- People who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe COVID-19 should avoid poorly ventilated indoor spaces.

## Wash your hands

- Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of most common infections, including COVID-19.
- Wash for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

## Masks

- Most people no longer need to wear masks in indoor public settings or outdoors unless COVID-19 community levels are **HIGH**.
- **Note that at any COVID-19 community level (even LOW), a person may choose to wear a mask based on personal preference and assessment of their own personal risk.**

- Children younger than 2 should not wear masks.
- If COVID-19 community levels are **MEDIUM** or **HIGH**, people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe COVID-19 should wear a mask or respirator in indoor public settings.
- If you live with or visit someone who is immunocompromised or at high risk for severe COVID-19, consider wearing a mask or respirator when indoors with them.
- Select the most protective mask that fits well, and that you are able to wear consistently.
  - Disposable procedure masks (aka surgical masks) are generally more protective than cloth masks.
  - Properly fitting respirators (e.g.: KN95s, N95s) provide the highest levels of protection but may be less comfortable to wear for long periods of time.
- Wear a mask or respirator when you are sick or in quarantine.
- If you are caring for someone with COVID-19, wear a respirator for the best protection.
- For more information about masks and respirators, see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html)

### **Social distancing**

- Social distancing = maintaining 6 feet distance or more between yourself and other people.
- If you are **up to date** on your COVID-19 vaccine, you do not need to practice routine social distancing unless COVID-19 community levels are **HIGH**.
- The following groups of people should continue social distancing (at least 6 feet) from others in indoor public spaces:
  - People who are unvaccinated (including children younger than 5), partially vaccinated, or not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine
  - Immunocompromised people
  - People who are at high risk for severe COVID-19
- Maintain social distance from sick people whenever possible.

### **COVID-19 testing**

- Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or if you are exposed to someone with COVID-19
- At home viral test kits are available, easy to use, and produce rapid test results.
- Early detection is especially important for those who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe COVID-19, so that COVID-19 treatments can be started as soon as possible. (e.g.: antiviral pills and monoclonal antibodies).
- If community COVID-19 levels are **MEDIUM** or **HIGH**, and you live with or visit someone who is immunocompromised or at high risk for severe COVID-19, consider self-testing before contact.
- For more information about:
  - Self-testing, see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/self-testing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/self-testing.html)
  - Where to get a COVID-19 test in DC, see [coronavirus.dc.gov/testing](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/testing)

### **Quarantine after exposure**

- **Quarantine** is the process of separating individuals who have been exposed to an infectious agent (like COVID-19) before they develop symptoms of infection or test positive for infection, for the duration of time that covers the incubation period for the pathogen to prevent further spread.
- Any person required to quarantine should follow DC Health's quarantine instructions, regardless of the level of COVID-19 in the community.
- For more information, see *Guidance for Close Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have Quarantine and Testing* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

### **Isolation (for COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test)**

- **Isolation** is the process of separating individuals with symptoms of an infection or confirmed diagnosis of an infection (like COVID-19) away from others, to prevent spread of a pathogen.
- Any person with symptoms of COVID-19, awaiting a viral test result with symptoms, or with a confirmed positive result should follow DC Health's isolation instructions, regardless of the level of COVID-19 in the community.
- For more information, see *Guidance for Isolation: People who Test Positive for COVID-19* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

### **Activities**

- If you are in a location that has **HIGH** community COVID-19 levels or low vaccination levels<sup>2</sup>, consider choosing safer activities.
  - Outdoor activities are safer than indoor activities.
  - Characteristics of higher risk activities may include settings where:
    - Masks need to be removed, such as for eating and drinking.
    - There is close mingling of people from many different households
    - There is increased forced exhalation, like during workouts or singing.
    - People need to talk louder, or yell, due to background noise level or music, which promotes increased droplet and small particle production.
    - Indoor settings with poor ventilation.

### **Travel**

- Masks are still required on public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States (on an airplane, train, bus, taxi, ride-share vehicle, or at a transportation hub such as an airport or train station).
- To stay up to date on the latest travel recommendations, see [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html)

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov) for the most updated information.

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<sup>2</sup> To look up vaccination levels, see [data.cdc.gov/Vaccinations/COVID-19-Vaccinations-in-the-United-States-County/8xkx-amqh](https://data.cdc.gov/Vaccinations/COVID-19-Vaccinations-in-the-United-States-County/8xkx-amqh).