Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance for People who are not Fully Vaccinated or Immunocompromised

While availability of effective COVID-19 vaccines is helping society gradually return to normal, COVID-19 still presents a serious health threat. People should continue to take precautions to stay safe as vaccination rates increase. This document describes best practices that members of the public should follow if they are not fully vaccinated or immunocompromised to help reduce the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19 between your family and friends, coworkers, and the community. For guidance for people who are fully vaccinated, see Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance

- A person is considered fully vaccinated 14 days after they complete a primary COVID-19 vaccine series (after the second dose of a 2-dose series, or after one dose of a single-dose vaccine).
- People who are immunocompromised may not be fully protected even if they are fully vaccinated. Because of this, immunocompromised people should continue taking all the same precautions as unvaccinated people and should consult with their healthcare provider.

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.
- People can become sick with COVID-19 by:
  - breathing in infected air
  - being splashed or sprayed in their eyes, nose, or mouth with infectious droplets (e.g., from a cough)
  OR
  - 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 sometimes spread between people in the air over longer distances, especially in crowded indoor settings with poor ventilation.
- COVID-19 can also spread from environmental surfaces, but this is uncommon.

How to protect yourself and others

Get vaccinated!
- Vaccination is the most important public health intervention for ending the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the COVID-19 vaccine is available to everyone age 5 and older. All adults 18 and older should also get a COVID-19 booster shot. If you are not vaccinated, find out more about the COVID-19 vaccines at coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine.
- COVID-19 vaccines are free, safe, and effective. However, no vaccines are 100% effective and there are breakthrough cases of COVID-19 even in fully vaccinated people. Fortunately, if you catch COVID-19 when you are fully vaccinated, the

1 Immunocompromised means having 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.

2 The primary series is the standard vaccine course before any additional (e.g., booster) doses
infection is more likely to be mild. The vaccines are very effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death. At this point, most people who become very sick with COVID-19 are unvaccinated people. In DC, over 97% of those hospitalized with COVID-19 are unvaccinated.

- Vaccination lowers a person’s risk during all activities.
- **People who are unvaccinated remain at higher risk for catching COVID-19 and need to take more precautions than people who are vaccinated.**

### Everyday prevention measures

Use of multiple layered COVID-19 prevention measures is the best way to prevent COVID-19. No one measure is perfect by itself, but when used together they are powerful. They include:

- **Wearing a mask** to decrease risk of breathing in infected air or being exposed to splashes or sprays, or touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. DC Health issued a Mask Advisory on December 2 encouraging all residents, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a mask when indoors at public settings.
  - For more information see *Mask Guidance for the General Public* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](http://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).
- **Practicing physical distancing** of 6 feet to decrease risk of breathing in infected air or being exposed to splashes or sprays.
- **Frequent hand hygiene** to decrease risk of getting COVID-19 from touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- **Avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces** to decrease risk of breathing in infected air or being exposed to splashes or sprays.
- **Monitoring your health and staying home when sick** so you do not expose others if you become sick.
- **Cleaning high touch surfaces regularly** (for example, daily), and disinfecting surfaces as needed so you decrease the risk of environmental exposure even more. High touch surfaces in a home include: doorknobs, handles, light switches, tables, and countertops.

### Choosing activities wisely

#### Basic principles

- Continue to choose your activities wisely. Understand the risk of different activities to you and your family.
- Outdoor activities are safer than indoor activities.
- Public settings where people are wearing masks and can keep 6 feet of space between each other remain the safest option.
- When a region has **higher** levels of COVID-19, activities are higher risk for people who are not fully vaccinated and people who are immunocompromised.
- When a region has **low** levels of COVID-19, activities for everyone (including people who are not fully vaccinated and immunocompromised people) are lower risk.
- Before you go out, find out what kind of COVID-19 safety protocols are in place at your destination. You may be able to find this information out on an

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3 To look up current levels of community transmission (and other data including local vaccination rates) for DC and other areas of the country, see the *CDC Data Tracker* at [covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view](http://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view)
establishment’s website or social media pages, or call ahead and ask questions.

- Stay home if you are sick, if you have tested positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
  o For more information about what to do if you are exposed to a person with COVID-19 please see Guidance for Close Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have COVID-19: Quarantine and Testing.
  o For more information about what to do if you test positive for COVID-19, see Guidance for People Who Test Positive for COVID-19 and their Household Members.
  o These guidances can be found at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
- People who are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 and are not fully vaccinated or who are immunocompromised should wear masks and maintain 6 feet of distance when interacting with people outside of their household.
- In outdoor or private home settings where a mix of fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people may be present, the use of preventive measures like masks and physical distancing by everyone will reduce the risk to individuals who are not fully vaccinated or immunocompromised (including children younger than 5).
- Characteristics of higher risk settings may include activities where:
  o Masks need to be removed, such as for eating and drinking.
  o There is close mingling of people from many different households
  o There is increased forced exhalation, like during workouts or singing.
  o People need to talk louder, or yell, due to background noise level or music, which promotes increased droplet and small particle production.

Bars, restaurants, nightclubs, and entertainment venues
- Ways to lower risk:
  o If you are not fully vaccinated or immunocompromised, the safest option is to continue choosing virtual options or use take-out or delivery services.
  o Wear a well-fitting mask during the activity and maintain 6 feet of physical distancing from those not in your group.
  o Choose establishments that offer outdoor seating and service.
  o Avoid going at busy times (e.g., weekends, holidays).
  o Minimize time spent at an establishment.

Small or large gatherings
- Ways to lower risk:
  o If you are not fully vaccinated or are immunocompromised, the safest option is to attend small gatherings with fully vaccinated friends and family.
  o Wear a well-fitting mask.
  o Attend/host outdoor gatherings instead of indoors.
  o If at a larger gathering, maintain 6 feet from people from other households.
  o For settings where voices are raised, maintain 10 feet of distance from others.
  o Avoid shared food, utensils, and other items.
  o If hosting a gathering, remind guests to stay home if they’re sick, and limit the number of people handling or serving food.

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4 For a list of conditions which put people at risk for severe COVID-19, see Guidance for People at Higher Risk for Severe COVID-19 at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
**Gyms, sports, and pools**

- Ways to lower risk:
  - The safest option if you are not fully vaccinated or are immunocompromised, is to continue choosing virtual options.
  - Participate in outdoor activities.
  - Wear a well-fitting mask during activities and maintain 6 feet of physical distancing from others.
  - During water activities when masks should not be worn, maintain 6 feet from others, and bring an extra mask in case your mask gets wet.
  - Avoid busy times (e.g., weekends, holidays).
  - Minimize time spent indoors at an establishment.

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit coronavirus.dc.gov for the most updated information.