

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance for the Public (Not Fully Vaccinated)

While availability of effective COVID-19 vaccines is allowing for society to re-open, COVID-19 still presents a risk to the health of our community. 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** 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.

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 the 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. Currently all Americans age 12 and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. It is vital for everyone to get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible. If you're not vaccinated, find out more about the COVID-19 vaccines at coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective even against the circulating variants of the virus that causes COVID-19, including the Delta variant. 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 infection will likely 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.

- Vaccination lowers a person's risk during all activities.
- A person is considered **fully vaccinated** 14 days after receiving the last dose of a COVID-19 vaccination series (after the second dose of a 2-dose series, or after one dose of a single-dose vaccine).
 - NOTE: 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
- 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 very 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.
 - **UPDATE: DC has an indoor mask mandate for all people in public settings regardless of their vaccination status. This policy took effect July 31, 2021.**
 - **For more information see *Mask Guidance for the General Public* at 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.
- When a region has higher levels of COVID-19, activities are higher risk for unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people, and people who are immunocompromised and may not have full protection from the vaccine.
- When a region has low levels of COVID-19, activities for everyone (including unvaccinated people and immunocompromised people) are lower risk.
- For information on the current level of community spread in DC, visit coronavirus.dc.gov/page/reopening-metrics.
- Before you go out, find out what kind of COVID-19 safety protocols are in place where you are going. You may be able to find this information out on an 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.
 - For more information about what to do if you are exposed to a person with COVID-19 please see these guidances:
 - *Guidance for Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have COVID-19*
 - *Guidance for Quarantine after COVID-19 Exposure*
 - 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*.
 - These guidances can be found at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.

- People who are at **high risk of severe disease from COVID-19¹** and are not fully **vaccinated** should wear a face mask 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 face masks and physical distancing by everyone will reduce the risk to individuals who are not fully vaccinated, including children younger than age 12.**
- Characteristics of higher risk settings may include activities 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.
- Public settings where people are wearing face masks and can keep 6 feet of space between each other remain the safest option.

Bars, Restaurants, Nightclubs, and Entertainment Venues

- Ways to decrease risk:
 - If you are not fully vaccinated, continuing to choose virtual options or use take-out or delivery services is the safest option.
 - Wearing a well-fitting face mask during the activity and maintaining 6 feet of physical distancing from those not in your group.
 - Choosing establishments that offer outdoor seating and service.
 - Avoiding going at busy times (e.g., weekends, holidays).
 - Minimizing time spent at the establishment.

Small or large gatherings

- Ways to decrease risk:
 - If you are not fully vaccinated, attending small gatherings with fully vaccinated friends and family is the safest option.
 - Wearing a well-fitting face mask.
 - Attending/hosting outdoor gatherings instead of indoors.
 - If in a larger gathering, maintaining 6 feet from people from other households.
 - For voices where voices are raised, maintaining 10 feet of distance from others.
 - Avoiding shared food, utensils, and other items.
 - If hosting a gathering, remind guests to stay home if they're sick, and limit the number of people handling or serving food.

Gyms, Sports, and Pools

- Ways to decrease risk:
 - If you are not fully vaccinated, continuing to choose virtual options is the safest option.
 - Wearing a well-fitting face mask during activities and maintaining 6 feet of physical distancing from others.
 - During water activities when face masks should not be worn, maintaining 6 feet from others, and bringing an extra mask in case your face mask gets wet.
 - Participating in outdoor activities.

¹ For a list of conditions which put people at risk for severe COVID-19, see *Guidance for People with Chronic Conditions* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance

- Avoiding busy times (e.g., weekends, holidays).
- Minimizing time spent indoors at the establishment.

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