

## **Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance for the Public**

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 amongst your family and friends, coworkers, and the community. For additional information, visit [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://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**

COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and effective at keeping people from getting COVID-19, and are now readily available for everyone in DC age 12 and older. There is some evidence to show it may help prevent spread from infected people who are not showing symptoms. They are also very effective at preventing people from needing to be hospitalized or dying if they do get sick with COVID-19. Evidence on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in real world settings, including vaccine effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2 variants currently circulating in the US and the region, create an opportunity for reducing public health mitigation measures for fully vaccinated persons. After you are fully vaccinated, you can safely start doing some things you had stopped doing because of the pandemic.

- 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).
- People who are immunocompromised may not be protected even when they are fully vaccinated, 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.
- Find out more about getting the COVID-19 vaccine at [coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine).
- For guidance about what you can do when you are vaccinated, see *Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

## 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 Face Masks or Cloth Face Coverings** to decrease risk of breathing in infected air or being exposed to splashes or sprays, or touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- **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 daily**, and disinfecting surfaces as needed so you decrease the risk of environmental exposure even more.

## Choosing Activities Wisely

### Basic Principles

- If you are fully vaccinated, you can resume activities that you did before the pandemic.
- When a region has higher levels of COVID-19, such as Phase 2, activities are higher risk for unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people, or people who are immunocompromised and may not have full protection from the vaccine.
- When a region has low levels of COVID-19, such as in Phase 3, activities for everyone (including unvaccinated people) are lower risk.
- Continue to choose your activities wisely. Understand the risk of different activities to you and your family.
- 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.
  - People who are fully vaccinated or have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 in the last 90 days do not need to quarantine after exposure.
  - For more information about what to do if you are exposed to a person with COVID-19 please see these guidances at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance):
    - *Guidance for Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have COVID-19*
    - *Guidance for Quarantine after COVID-19 Exposure*
- People who are at **high risk of severe disease from COVID-19<sup>1</sup> 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 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 11 and under.**

---

<sup>1</sup> 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](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance)

- **If you are not fully vaccinated, choosing not to wear a mask puts your own health, and the health of other people who cannot get vaccinated or who are immunocompromised, at risk.**
- 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 work outs or singing.
  - People need to talk louder, or yell, due to background noise level or music, which promotes increased droplet and small particle production.
- Outdoor activities are safer than indoor activities.
- Public settings where people are wearing face masks and can keep 6 feet of space between each other remain the safest option during Phase 2.

### **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 event 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, especially when indoors.
  - Attending/planning 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 the activities and maintaining 6 feet of physical distancing from others.
  - Participating in outdoor activities.
  - Avoiding busy times (e.g., weekends, holidays).
  - Minimizing time spent indoors at the establishment.
  - During water activities when face masks should not be worn, maintaining 6 feet from others, and bringing a second mask in case your face mask gets wet.

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.