

COVID-19: Considerations to Protect Yourself

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. These droplets and particles can be breathed in by other people, or land on their eyes, noses, or mouth. In some circumstances, they may contaminate surfaces they touch. People who are closer than 6 feet from the infected person are most likely to get infected, especially if they have yet to be vaccinated for COVID-19.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [guidance](#) indicates that people who are fully vaccinated can resume activities they did before the pandemic. However, to reduce your risk of being infected with the Delta variant and possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area where there is substantial or high transmission of COVID-19.

While COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing COVID-19 disease, especially severe illness and death, and they reduce the risk of people spreading COVID-19, Central District Health (CDH) recognizes *there are many environments where wearing a mask and physically distancing continue to be the safest measures for everyone particularly with the Delta variant on the rise and the potential for increased virus transmission and severity of illness.*

As we navigate returning to many of our pre-pandemic norms, CDH wants to remind people to make their own health and safety assessments that are both in their personal best interest, respectful, and in the best interest of those around them. This guidance aims to provide considerations and resources for use in determining whether continued measures like masking and physical distancing might be the safest choices in conjunction with being fully vaccinated.

*Note: Information addressed in this document does **not** apply in [healthcare settings](#), [correctional/detention settings](#), [homeless shelters](#) and [schools](#).*

What does it mean to be fully vaccinated?

In general, people are considered fully vaccinated:

- 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or
- 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine

If you don't meet these requirements, regardless of your age, you are **NOT** fully vaccinated. Keep taking all [precautions](#) until you are fully vaccinated.

If you have a condition or are taking medications that weaken your immune system, you may NOT be fully protected even if you are fully vaccinated. Talk to your healthcare provider. Even after vaccination, you may need to continue taking all precautions.

COVID-19 vaccines provide very high-level protection against what's most important: serious infections with hospitalization and deaths. Since no vaccine is 100% effective, some vaccinated people may become infected with COVID-19 and be able to pass the infection to others, although that is *much* less likely than for yet to be vaccinated people. When vaccinated people do become infected, their illness is typically mild and not serious. Unfortunately, the Delta variant may increase the risk of vaccinated people developing mild breakthrough infections compared to earlier strains, but the vaccines still offer excellent protection.

Consideration: Gatherings

Gatherings, especially large ones, continue to be higher-risk environments given that people share air with those around them and often for long durations of time. When multiple groups of people mix and vaccination status is unknown, it can greatly increase risk of exposure. When gathering with others, consider who is in the mix – might there be people who are yet to be vaccinated or immunocompromised and at a higher risk? Are there kids present who are unable to receive vaccine due to their age? What duration of time are you spending among a group of people and how close are you to them? When there is the potential for people with varying risk levels and levels of protection to mix, wearing a mask and maintaining physical distancing are valuable ways to help protect yourself and those you are around in a group setting. CDC guidance (issued July 27, 2021) recommends that people wear masks in indoor public settings in communities where transmission is substantial or high. View community transmission levels by county at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>.

Risk is greatly reduced in outdoor settings, but actions like talking loudly over music or noise, people singing, shouting or cheering, and close quarters all increase risk whether or not you are fully vaccinated.

Anyone who is yet to be vaccinated in a group setting should practice all precautions, which include wearing a mask and maintaining physical distancing.

- Read CDC's Guidance for [Protecting Yourself & Others](#)

Consideration: Varying community vaccination rates

Whether you are traveling around or outside of Idaho, or moving throughout the community you live in, consider the current COVID-19 vaccination rates. A community's vaccination rate is one helpful indicator in determining potential risk for COVID-19 exposure.

Remember, in the U.S., COVID-19 vaccines are not yet authorized for kids under the age of 12, which makes for a gap among this younger population. For those 12 and older, the COVID-19 vaccine is in abundant supply, free of cost, and offered on a walk-in basis through many healthcare providers.

- To view COVID-19 vaccination rates in Idaho, view the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's vaccine data dashboard, https://public.tableau.com/views/COVID-19VaccineDataDashboard/LandingPage?:language=en&:display_count=y&publish=yes&:origin=viz_share_link
- To view vaccination rates throughout the U.S., visit <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>.

- To find a vaccine location in Ada, Boise, Elmore or Valley Counties, visit <https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/covid-vaccine.php>

Consideration: Those unable to be vaccinated

Outside of personal choice, there may be reasons people are not vaccinated for COVID-19. For instance, vaccines are not currently authorized for use in children under the age of 12 in the United States. Additionally, some people with certain chronic diseases that put them at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness may be unable to receive vaccine based on guidance from their healthcare provider. For these reasons, masking and physical distancing may be in the best interest to protect both you and the yet to be vaccinated person you are interacting with.

- Those at elevated risk of severe disease and/or immunocompromised should talk with their healthcare provider and likely continue to wear a mask during interactions with those outside of their immediate household.

Consideration: Varying community transmission levels

Whether you are traveling around or outside of Idaho, or moving throughout the community you live in, consider the current COVID-19 transmission levels. A community's transmission level is one helpful indicator in determining potential risk for COVID-19 exposure and may likely impact any recommendations or requirements around wearing a mask in public.

It is recommended everyone, including those fully vaccinated, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area where there is substantial or high transmission of COVID-19.

- View levels of community transmission at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>

Consideration: Delta variant is highly transmissible and can cause more severe illness

Information indicates the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines provide protection from severe COVID-19 illness, help prevent hospitalizations and deaths, and are quite effective against the Delta variant.

The Delta variant spreads more than twice as easily from one person to another, compared with earlier strains, which may lead to an increase in cases of COVID-19. An increase in the number of cases will put more strain on health care resources, lead to more hospitalizations, and potentially more deaths. The Delta variant has become the predominant variant making up 80% of cases as of July, 2021, compared to 1% in May, 2021, according to CDC data. Fortunately, the vaccines work. New data are showing that a small number of vaccinated people can get the Delta variant and may be contagious, but these cases represent a very small amount of transmission occurring around the country.

- To learn more about variants identified in Idaho residents, select the *Laboratory Testing* option at <https://public.tableau.com/profile/idaho.division.of.public.health#!/vizhome/DPHIdahoCOVID-19Dashboard/Home>
- To learn more about variants being identified throughout the U.S., visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html>

Consideration: Workplaces and local businesses

Whether or not employees are fully vaccinated, your workplace may choose to implement specific requirements around mask wearing and other safety measures. Businesses should clearly communicate any changes in requirements or recommendations to employees and make expectations clear for anyone who enters your building (e.g.: the public/customers/clients/visitors). Businesses are encouraged to continue offering virtual meeting attendance as an option. If your workplace allows vaccinated employees to not wear masks, ensure there is no stigma associated with mask wearing – regardless of vaccine status. Consider how you will encourage and/or enforce yet to be vaccinated team members to wear a mask.

Where possible, post visible signage in your establishment and on entry doors to inform incoming patrons of the policy in place. Provide hand sanitizer in accessible locations and complimentary masks upon entry. Employees should work with their human resources point of contact or manager regarding any questions or concerns they might have around workplace health and safety requirements.

It is recommended everyone, including those fully vaccinated, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area where there is substantial or high transmission of COVID-19. Please consider if your workplace or business is a public space and what the current community transmission levels are when implementing policies or determining when to mask.

- Learn more about workplace guidance and strategies at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/workplaces-businesses/index.html>

Consideration: Masking and physical distancing are still effective measures, especially when combined with COVID-19 vaccination

Wearing a mask and physically distancing from those outside of your household, have become our norms during this pandemic. CDC guidance (July 27, 2021) recommends that anyone, regardless of their vaccine status, in communities with substantial or high transmission, wear a mask in indoor public settings. View community transmission levels by county at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>.

Wearing a mask, along with physical distancing, and choosing to get vaccinated for COVID-19, continue to be our best defense in this pandemic. Getting vaccinated prevents severe illness, hospitalization, and death while helping reduce the spread of the virus in the community. With the Delta variant present in Idaho counties, choosing to get vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself, your loved ones, and those around you.

Continue to practice all [precautions](#) around those outside of their household. Exercise kindness and respect toward anyone using these effective protection measures.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CDC's [Choosing Safer Activities](#) – includes an infographic for vaccinated and yet to be vaccinated people
- [CDC's Key Things to Know about COVID-19 Vaccines – What we know & what we're still learning](#)
- [CDC: Emotional Well-Being Resources](#)
- [Central District Health's COVID-19 webpage directory](#)
- [State of Idaho Coronavirus Website \(& data dashboards\)](#)