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Masking FAQ

- May 14, 2021
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On May 13, 2021 the CDC issued Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

What does the new CDC guidance mean for me?

Those who are fully vaccinated, meaning that they have received all necessary doses and waited two weeks, may resume activities without wearing masks or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.

People who are not fully vaccinated (those who are not at least two weeks post-completion of a vaccination series) remain at risk of contracting and transmitting the virus. To protect their own health and the health of people around them, it is vital that those not fully vaccinated continue to wear a face covering when in public around other people, practice social distancing, and maintain other CDC-recommended measures to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

We would like to encourage patience and respect on the part of everyone in navigating this change. While you know if you are fully vaccinated, the businesses that you go to and the people you are around in public don't have the same knowledge. Businesses retain the right to require their employees and customers be masked. It is good practice to keep a mask with you so that you can be respectful of the needs of others.

How does this new guidance affect the Public Health Orders in Saint Louis County?

Saint Louis County has rescinded the ReOpenSTL Order. In accordance with CDC Guidelines, DPH strongly recommends that individuals who are not fully vaccinated continue to social distance AND wear face coverings when indoors around other people and wear face coverings OR social distance when outdoors.

The new CDC guidance does not change the [Sixth Amended Quarantine and Isolation Order](#), [Residential Living Facilities Reporting Requirement Order](#), [Amended Non-Congregate Sheltering Order](#), and the [Rapid Notification Order](#).

What does it mean to be “fully vaccinated?”

According to the CDC, “people are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 ≥ 2 weeks after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or ≥ 2 weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson and Johnson [J&J]/Janssen). Individuals who received COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization (e.g. AstraZeneca/Oxford) are also considered to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 ≥ 2 weeks after they have received the second dose.

There is currently no post-vaccination time limit on fully vaccinated status. The post-vaccination time limit on fully vaccinated status will be updated as CDC releases updated recommendations and guidelines. It is likely that additional booster doses will be encouraged/required moving forward as the virus and our understanding of it changes.

Unvaccinated people refers to individuals of all ages, including children, that have not completed a vaccination series and waited the required time to reach full immunity.

What is the current status of vaccination efforts in the St. Louis region? What level of protection offered by the vaccine?

As of 5/14/21, over 33% of St. Louis County residents have completed their vaccine series (i.e., 2 doses of Pfizer or Moderna or 1 dose of J&J) and almost 42% of residents have received at least one dose. The percentage of residents that have completed their full course of vaccines and the required waiting period is not currently available. For more information about the current status of vaccination, please [click here](#).

Out of over 75 million fully vaccinated Americans, the CDC has identified 5,814 breakthrough cases, of which only 30% had symptoms. This suggests that the vaccine provides at least 95% protection. In addition, fully vaccinated Americans that do get COVID are more likely to have asymptomatic or non-serious infections.

What impact does the new guidance have on testing, isolation, and quarantine?

The new CDC guidance does not change current isolation and quarantine requirements, as requirements already had specific exceptions in place for fully vaccinated people.

Isolation Cases of COVID-19 are still required to isolate for 10 days following their symptom onset or specimen collection (whichever was earlier) *regardless of vaccination status*.

Quarantine Vaccination status does impact whether a person (i.e., a contact) who has been exposed to a positive case is required to quarantine. People who are not fully vaccinated and have been identified as close contacts of a COVID-19 case are required to quarantine for 10 days following their last exposure to the infectious case. Most fully vaccinated people with no COVID-like symptoms following an exposure to someone with COVID-19 do not need to quarantine, be restricted from work, or be tested following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, as their risk of infection is low. If a fully vaccinated person is a household contact to a case and works with a primarily unvaccinated population (e.g., school children), the vaccinated person should consider taking extra precautions (e.g., wearing a mask and maintaining social distance) to minimize the

possibility of transmission to those who are unvaccinated. All close contacts to a positive person – vaccinated or unvaccinated – should still monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure. Fully vaccinated individuals do not need to get tested or to quarantine as long as they remain asymptomatic.

What does the new guidance mean for people who are fully vaccinated but are immunocompromised?

According to the CDC, “People with immunocompromising conditions, including those taking immunosuppressive medications (for instance drugs, such as mycophenolate and rituximab, to suppress rejection of transplanted organs or to treat rheumatologic conditions), should discuss the need for personal protective measures with their healthcare provider after vaccination.”

If I am fully vaccinated, are there reasons I might still choose to wear a mask or practice social distancing while in public?

Yes. While the risk of COVID-19 infection and subsequent transmission to others is very low among those who are fully vaccinated, it is not zero. Because the majority of St. Louis County residents have not been fully vaccinated (including many who are not yet eligible and those who have a medical contraindication) wearing a mask while in public isn't just protecting you, it's also protecting those around you. Additionally, for many people, masking serves as part of a culture of respect for those who cannot or have not been vaccinated. For example, a parent or teacher may remain masked in order to serve as a good example for unvaccinated children.

Are there any settings where the new CDC guidance does not apply?

Yes. As stated in the CDC guidance, “all travelers are required to wear a mask on all planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and stations.”

The guidance is also not appropriate for such high-risk settings as healthcare facilities or congregate living facilities (e.g., homeless shelters, jails/prisons/detention centers).

Can this guidance change in the future? Why do the public health recommendations keep changing?

Yes, the guidance could be reversed or updated based on new information, such as an increase in transmission rates nationally or locally or new variants against which vaccination is not as effective.

While shifting guidance can be frustrating and sometimes confusing, it is essential that recommendations reflect both the latest scientific understanding and the current situation “on the ground.” As scientists learn more about this novel virus and how it is transmitted in different populations, and as new variants emerge that could potentially target different populations (e.g., children who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated), we must continue to ensure that our guidance reflects the most up-to-date knowledge of the current situation locally, nationally, and globally.

Can businesses require staff to wear masks while working on-site, even if the staff member is fully vaccinated? Can a business require customers to wear masks while on-site?

As noted in the CDC guidance, fully vaccinated individuals may “resume activities without wearing masks or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.” It is up to individual businesses or workplaces if they would like to require masks for staff and/or customers. We recommend that businesses consider the level of risk in their specific setting (e.g., crowding, ventilation, indoor/outdoor) when making these types of operational decisions. HIPAA (The Health Information Portability and Accountability Act) creates data privacy

responsibilities within the context of “covered entities” during the provision of healthcare services. HIPAA’s provisions do not prevent a business asking an employee or customers about their vaccine status. As identified by the EEOC, businesses are allowed to incentivize or require the vaccine (while noting certain exceptions for disability and religious exceptions). Businesses are also generally able to request proof of vaccination as long as they are able to cite a direct threat to other employees or customers. [More information can be found here.](#)

Can a business require proof of vaccination for a staff member or customer who is not wearing a mask?

As above, it is up to individual businesses or workplaces if they want to require proof of vaccination for staff members or customers who are not wearing masks. We recommend that businesses consider the level of risk in their specific setting (e.g., crowding, ventilation, indoor/outdoor) when making these types of operational decisions. As identified by the EEOC, businesses are allowed to incentivize or require the vaccine (while noting certain exceptions for disability and religious exceptions). Businesses are also generally able to request proof of vaccination as long as they are able to cite a direct threat to other employees or customers. [More information can be found here.](#)

Can a business or other entity prohibit someone from entering if the person is wearing a mask?

Yes. Private businesses may put in place and enforce any policies they would like as long as they are not explicitly prohibited from doing so by federal, state, or local law.

Can individuals or households require those entering their home (e.g., babysitters, friends, contractors) wear a mask while inside their private home? Can individuals or households ask for proof of vaccination?

Individuals have always been able to make decisions about what goes on in their own homes as long as it is within local, state, and federal law. The new guidance does not change this.

How does this guidance apply to settings with largely unvaccinated populations (e.g., daycares, schools)?

We recommend that schools and daycares continue to have both students and staff mask while indoors. In daycare and elementary school settings, students are not yet eligible for vaccination. Because of the susceptibility of those who are unvaccinated, as well operational challenges (such as maintaining cooperation of students with masking while staff are not wearing masks), we recommend maintaining the current practice of masking.

How does this apply to middle school and high school settings?

We recommend that middle and high school settings continue to have both students and staff mask while indoors. Especially while vaccination rates remain relatively low (especially among newly-eligible 12-to-15-year-olds), it is difficult to assess who is vaccinated and who isn’t. Additionally, continued indoor mask use by both students and staff may help alleviate operational challenges (such as maintaining cooperation with masking for those who are not yet vaccinated).

Are schools allowed to implement modified quarantine if the case or close contact was not wearing a mask?

If schools opt to drop mask mandate, modified quarantine cannot be implemented. Close contacts of a case will be required to quarantine for 10 days from the last exposure to the positive person and continue to self-monitor

for symptoms for 14 days after the last exposure to the positive person.

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