



## PROVIDERS AS TRUSTED MESSENGERS

# The COVID Variants

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### What is a COVID variant?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), viral mutations and variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the U.S. are being routinely monitored through sequence-based surveillance, laboratory studies, and epidemiological investigations. While multiple naturally occurring mutations have been documented globally throughout the pandemic, there are currently four variants that are categorized as [variants of concern](#) by the U.S. SARS-CoV-2 Interagency Group (SIG). The “variants of concern” classification pertains to variants that show a significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated from a previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, and more failures in diagnostic detection.

One of these variants – Delta (B1617.2) – is spreading more easily and causing more severe disease than the original COVID-19 virus. CDC [data](#) show that Delta is responsible for a majority of the newly diagnosed coronavirus cases, accounting for more than 82% of U.S. infections, and is now the dominant strain. People infected with the Delta variant are more likely to be hospitalized. The symptoms of the Delta variant differ from other COVID-19 strains and include headache, sore throat, runny nose and fever.

### Are the COVID vaccines effective against the variants?

Data show that the COVID-19 vaccines offer substantial protection against infection and spread of the Delta variant for fully vaccinated individuals. In those instances when a fully vaccinated person became infected, the cases have typically been mild. The CDC generally considers people fully vaccinated

- two weeks after the second dose in a 2-dose vaccine series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines; or
- two weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine.



Localized surges of infections are occurring in places where vaccination rates remain low and among younger people and children, who are less likely to be vaccinated. While younger people tend to have less severe cases if infected, there is the risk of “long-haul” symptoms, which can negatively affect outcomes. Vaccination remains the best tool against the virus.

### Is it safe for children to receive a COVID vaccine?

It is recommended that anyone 12 years of age and older receive a COVID vaccine. Children 12 years and older are able to get the [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine](#). There have been reports of [myocarditis and pericarditis](#) in adolescents and young adults after vaccination. Confirmed cases have occurred mostly in male adolescents and young adults age 16 years and older. The CDC is tracking and monitoring these reports while still recommending vaccination as the benefits outweigh the known and potential risks.

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## The COVID Variants (continued)

### CDC Recommendations for the Fully Vaccinated

- The CDC [guidelines](#) state that fully vaccinated people can participate in many of the activities that they did before the pandemic.
- To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent spreading the virus to others, fully vaccinated people are encouraged to wear a mask in areas of [substantial or high transmission](#).
- Continue to wear a mask where required by laws, rules, regulations, or local guidance.
- Wearing a mask is most important for people who have or live with others who have weakened immune systems.

As we learn more, guidance may change. Refer to the [summary of recent changes](#) for the most up-to-date CDC recommendations for fully vaccinated people.

### Recommendation for People Who are Not Fully Vaccinated

- The CDC recommends that individuals who are age 2 years or older and not fully vaccinated wear a mask in indoor public places.
- In geographic areas with high numbers of COVID cases, people who are not fully vaccinated should consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings and for activities that result in close contact with people who are not fully vaccinated.
- Wearing a mask over the nose and mouth is required on public transportation and while indoors at transportation hubs, such as airports and stations.

### COVID-19 Vaccine Disparities

The [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) provides current data on the total U.S. population that has received at least one dose of a vaccine and those who are fully vaccinated. While there has been substantial progress toward alleviating COVID-19 infections and death through vaccination, CDC [demographic data](#) show disparities in vaccination distribution across the U.S. with racial and ethnic minorities having lower vaccination rates compared to their white counterparts. These data indicate that there is still work to be done to ensure broad protection across all demographic groups and communities, especially for [Black and Hispanic](#) populations.

### Resources

[General Coronavirus Information](#) (CDC & FEMA)

[Moderna Provides a Clinical Update on Neutralizing Activity of its COVID-19 Vaccine on Emerging Variants](#)

Moderna

[Trusted Sources of Vaccine Information](#)

Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)

[We Can Do This](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

[COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Resources](#)

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[Vaccine Finder](#)

Vaccines.gov

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Resources

[Your Guide To Masks](#)

[Key Things to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

[Updated Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations in Response to COVID-19 Vaccination](#)

[COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Teens](#)

[Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Overview and Safety](#)

[Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines Among Your Patients](#)

[COVID-19 Vaccination Communication Toolkit](#)

[Travel Guidance](#)

[After International Travel Guidance](#)