

## **Public Health Committee Guidance for the General Public and High-Risk Individuals September 2022**

Over the past two and a half years, the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic have evolved which has required ongoing updates to our recommendations. Since inception, our goal has been to provide Dallas County residents, visitors, and businesses with helpful guidance and a “living” document based on emerging science and our understanding of new data and information.

We will continue to monitor metrics that capture COVID-19 infection rates (cases and case/population); diagnostic testing and surveillance, case and contact investigation, healthcare readiness, and measures of community protection such as vaccination rates. The current Dallas County metrics are real time, comprehensive and contain similar elements to those included in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Community Metrics. The Public Health Committee is aware that CDC and other public health groups frequently review and revise recommendations based on the best available data and understanding of COVID-19 risks. While we strive to keep our guidance aligned, **we also want to offer our residents additional measures that will ensure sustained safety in the county by accounting for local factors such as populations at risk of severe disease, vaccination rates, health care capacity, and overall community impact.** For these reasons, we also integrate additional information about variants and vaccination rates into our recommendations.

The new CDC guidance places more onus on personal responsibility. It is now up to us as individuals to make the best choices for ourselves while protecting those we love and our community. Protecting our community hinges on continuing to improve our COVID-19 vaccination rates. In the United States, the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone ages 6 months and older to prevent the severe complications of COVID-19, regardless of a history of prior SARS-COV-2 infection. The current CDC guidance for individuals who have received all recommended doses including all boosters (fully up to date), as opposed to partially vaccinated or not vaccinated, reflects how effective these vaccines are at preventing severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalizations, and death. Individuals who remain up to date with their vaccines will be able to do more activities with less risk and will contribute to the overall health of Dallas County.

### **Situation in Dallas County and North Texas:**

While the current situation is improved, we still are seeing high numbers of cases per day, with many more unreported due to the use of home tests. Fortunately, the numbers of people requiring emergency care and the proportion of individuals getting hospitalized is decreasing. Still, we are seeing high risk people develop severe disease and suffer the complications of COVID-19, especially the unvaccinated, the immunocompromised, and the elderly.

School has started. Schools have done a tremendous amount to mitigate the risks with increased ventilation and enhanced cleaning. Still, we know that communities of children with their associated activities serve as vehicles to transmit all respiratory viruses, including the one causing COVID-19, so additional measures may be needed to protect those who are vulnerable.

### **What can you do:**

**First and foremost,** get vaccinated and make sure you are “up to date” and have received all your recommended doses and boosters. There are now several types of COVID-19 vaccines available. These vaccines have been effective in reducing death, hospitalization and severe complications of COVID-19, long COVID, and decrease the risk of shedding and transmitting virus to others. If you are due for a booster, please go get it now. Boosters are now an important part of personal protection.

**Second**, masking, physical distancing (especially when there is a high risk of exposure), and good hand hygiene remain advised for your personal safety and the safety of the community. It is particularly important to employ these strategies with individuals who are 1) immunocompromised despite being up to date with their vaccinations, or 2) who are unvaccinated or not up-to-date, or 3) live with individuals at high-risk for COVID-19 complications such as the elderly or immunocompromised. These well-studied measures are also important to decrease other respiratory viruses such as influenza.

**Third**, get your flu shot also. Now is the time and we could see a lot of flu. You can receive your flu shot at the same time as COVID-19 vaccines.

**Finally**, to further reduce risk, consider antigen (rapid) COVID-19 testing in certain settings. For example, testing all individuals before group gatherings, especially if this includes immunocompromised or at-risk people, can further reduce the risk.

#### **Additional pre-exposure prevention for the immunocompromised:**

In addition to the measures above, if you are moderately or severely immunocompromised or are unable to receive COVID-19 vaccination because of your personal risk of severe adverse reactions, you may benefit from COVID-19 preexposure prophylaxis with monoclonal antibodies (Evusheld) which have been shown to prevent severe COVID-19 illness. These monoclonal antibodies are available at most hospitals and some outpatient settings in Dallas County and North Texas.

#### **What to do when exposed to someone with COVID-19:**

If you are exposed to COVID-19, follow the CDC guidance for masking and testing. All individuals who are exposed should **mask for 10 days** after the exposure and **test themselves starting on day 5** following the exposure (or sooner, if you are symptomatic). Currently, the CDC does not recommend quarantine if you are only exposed. In addition, you need to monitor for symptoms, and test if you develop symptoms.

#### **What to do when you test positive for COVID-19:**

If you test positive, you need to isolate (stay home) for a minimum of 5 days following the positive test. If you suspect you may have COVID-19 and the initial test is negative, and you are using at-home or rapid tests, the FDA recommends additional testing.

Test yourself if you are exposed or develop even mild symptoms regardless of known exposure or whether you have been vaccinated. Mask and isolate (stay home) when sick with COVID-19 to reduce the risk of spread to others.

If you are using at-home tests or rapid tests, repeat testing for a total of 2 tests (if symptomatic) or 3 tests (if exposed but not having symptoms) over multiple days is advised by the FDA to rule out infection. Tests should be taken 48 hours apart. Multiple tests when you use at home tests are necessary to reduce the risk of missing an infection.

#### **What to do if you are at high risk for COVID-19 complications and develop COVID-19:**

Follow the above guidance and quickly reach out to a health care provider about **treatment** options, regardless of vaccination status. These can further reduce your risk of a severe outcome.

**Additional resources:**

**Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

**CDC Recommendations for Isolation and Quarantine:**

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fyour-health%2Fquarantine-isolation.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fyour-health%2Fquarantine-isolation.html)

**Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html#mask>

**COVID-19 Data Tracker (for community transmission levels):**

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

**CDC High Risk Populations:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-care/underlyingconditions.html>

**Community Levels and Risk:**

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html#anchor\\_47145](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html#anchor_47145)

**Treatment:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

**Testing and Vaccinations:**

**FDA Testing Recommendations:** <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/safety-communications/home-covid-19-antigen-tests-take-steps-reduce-your-risk-false-negative-fda-safety-communication>

**Vaccine locator:** <https://www.vaccines.gov/> to find the nearest vaccination location.

## Why I Mask?

- Anyone should be allowed to wear a mask anytime, anyplace.
- Masking remains a proven method to reduce the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19, flu, and other respiratory viruses. Masks protect both the wearer and those around them.
- Individuals in health care settings, long term care facilities, and congregate living settings should still mask consistent with CDC and local guidance.
- Individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 (quarantining) or who are sick with or recovering from (isolating) COVID-19 should mask consistent with CDC guidance.
- You may see people wearing a mask for many reasons and it is important to support their choice. They may mask because...
  - They want to
    - Stay healthy for vacation
    - Protect the patients they work with
    - Protect others
  - They are
    - Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated
    - Not old enough to be vaccinated
    - Immunocompromised or otherwise high risk
    - Getting chemotherapy or a treatment that alters their immune system.
    - Sick
  - They
    - Live, volunteer, or work with other individuals who are immunocompromised or high risk.
    - Work in a hospital or nursing home where vulnerable people reside.
  - It is their personal preference for whatever reason.

## CDC Resources on Masking:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/use-n95-respirator.html>