

Public Health Committee Guidance for the Public and High-Risk Individuals

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has been dynamic and rapidly changing and has required ongoing updates to our recommendations. Since inception, our goal has been to provide Dallas County residents with helpful guidance based on science. This is a “living” document and we will continue to update it as the data and scientific understanding dictate.

We will continue to monitor metrics that capture COVID-19 infection rates (cases and case/population); diagnostic testing and surveillance, case and contact investigation and healthcare readiness. The current Dallas County metrics are comprehensive and similar elements are now included in the CDC Community Metrics. The Public Health Committee is aware that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (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 vaccination rates, health care capacity, and overall community impact.** For these reasons, we plan to integrate additional information about variants and vaccination rates into our recommendations.

Protecting our community hinges on continuing to improve our COVID-19 vaccination rates. The COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone ages 5 years and older in the United States for the prevention of COVID-19, regardless of a history of prior SARS-COV-2 infection. The CDC guidance for individuals who are fully up to date with their vaccines, as opposed to partially vaccinated or not current, 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.

Masking, physical distancing, and good hand hygiene remain advised for your personal safety. 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. To further reduce risk, consider antigen(rapid) testing all individuals before group gatherings especially if this includes immunocompromised or at-risk people.

Testing is important if you are exposed or develop even mild symptoms. You should mask and isolate when sick with COVID-19 to reduce the risk of spread. If you are exposed to COVID-19, follow the CDC guidance for quarantine recommendations.

Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People

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

CDC Statement on Recommended Isolation and Quarantine

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s1227-isolation-quarantine-guidance.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

Testing and Vaccinations:

<https://www.covidtests.gov/> to order free tests for your household.

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

Guidance for the Public: Protecting yourself and others!

Proven methods such as vaccination, masking, physical distancing, improving ventilation, and pre-event testing can further reduce the risk of spread even in communities at medium and low risk.

- All individuals who are unvaccinated or not “up to date” with vaccinations are at higher risk from severe outcomes from COVID-19.
- What can I do to continue to further protect myself and others, even when COVID is at lower levels?
 - **Get vaccinated and boosted!** Vaccination is safe and decreases the risk of getting COVID-19 or getting complications of COVID-19.
 - **Go to smaller or less crowded events.** Larger events, especially those that are indoors, increase the risk for spreading the virus.
 - **Use testing** or go to events that utilize additional testing to decrease the risk of transmission.
 - **Wear a mask** for personal protection which can significantly reduce the risk at these types of events.
 - **Improve ventilation** by going outdoors, opening windows, enhancing cross ventilation or air exchanges.
 - **Protect others.** Individuals should follow all CDC guidance for quarantine (following exposure to someone with COVID-19) and isolation (if sick with COVID-19) .

Guidance for High Risk or Immunocompromised Individuals: Protecting yourself and those around you!

Proven methods such as vaccination, masking, physical distancing, improving ventilation, and pre-event testing can further reduce the risk of spread even in communities at medium and low risk. Individuals who are not personally high risk, but who have frequent contact with high-risk individuals should consider these additional risk reduction strategies.

- Those at high-risk for COVID-19 complications include the unvaccinated, the elderly, the immunocompromised, people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart and lung diseases, individuals who are pregnant, or those who live or stay in long-term care facilities or other congregate settings. Individuals who live with or care for these high-risk groups pose a risk to them and should take extra precautions which are outlined by the CDC, Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS).
- Individuals at high-risk of COVID-19 complications or who are immunocompromised should stay up to date with vaccinations, which currently includes up to 4 total doses for those receiving mRNA vaccines or up to 3 total doses for those who initially received the Johnson&Johnson/Janssen vaccine.
- High-risk individuals can and should talk with their personal health care provider about their personal risks for COVID-19 and what protective actions they should take. These could include masking, vaccination, selecting types of events to attend, and pre-exposure and post-exposure medications.
- Individuals at high risk for COVID-19 should continue to mask in indoor public settings and should consider a more protective mask such as a KN95 or N95.
- For private gatherings, pre-event testing by all attendees, improved ventilation, or holding events outdoors can create a safer environment for these at-risk individuals. These options are especially important if individuals will be unmasked, for example at events where food and drink will be shared.
- For additional details from the CDC, please visit: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html#anchor_47145

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>

Free N95s may be available through your local pharmacy or community health center.