

Ask the expert



What is the delta variant and how do I protect myself?

The COVID-19 delta variant has taken the world by storm. Reports say it can spread faster, and those who are fully vaccinated can still spread the virus. We asked Dr. Lisa Harris to share the facts and ways to protect ourselves.

Q. Dr. Harris, what is the delta variant? Is it true that it spreads more easily?

✔ Viruses are constantly mutating, or changing, as they infect people. This can lead to new versions of a virus that are known as variants. The delta variant is a mutation of the COVID-19 virus. **The delta variant is powerful and from what experts know, it is more contagious and spreads more easily than the original virus.** It accounts for more than 80% of newly diagnosed cases in the U.S., according to the CDC.

Q. How does the delta variant affect those who are unvaccinated versus fully vaccinated?

✔ **Although the delta variant is more contagious, there is no data that suggests it causes more serious symptoms than the original COVID-19 strain.** The vast majority of people with serious symptoms are unvaccinated. For those who are fully vaccinated, we know that no vaccine grants us 100% immunity so there will be some breakthrough cases, but getting the vaccine greatly reduces the risk of major illness. Symptoms will be milder and you are less likely to be hospitalized if you are vaccinated.

Q. That's good to know, Dr. Harris. How can I protect myself from the delta variant?

✔ **Getting a COVID-19 vaccine remains the safest way to protect yourself.** All COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalizations and death from COVID-19. If you've gotten the first shot of a two-shot regimen (those from Pfizer and Moderna), make sure to get the second shot — early evidence suggests this is especially important for protecting against the variants.

If you are not vaccinated, get the vaccine. If you can, practice social distancing, wear a mask when in close proximity to other people, and avoid indoor social gatherings. Even those who are fully vaccinated should consider wearing masks in areas of high transmission. People with a weakened immune system need to be even more careful. Certain counties are recommending that masks be worn in indoor settings. Please check the [CDC's website](#) for more information.

Regardless of your vaccination status, stay home and away from others if you're feeling ill or have been exposed to COVID-19. Continue to wash your hands often, use hand sanitizer and avoid touching your face. This will help stop the variants from spreading.

Lisa Y. Harris, MD, FAAP, FACP, CPE

Dr. Lisa Y. Harris is our Vice President of Medical Affairs. She is a fellow of the American College of Physicians, fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a Certified Physician Executive through the American Association of Physician Leaders. Board-certified in internal medicine and pediatrics, Dr. Harris has been in clinical practice since 1995.

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Q. Can fully vaccinated people transmit the delta variant to other people? How do I protect my younger family members from the delta variant?

- ✓ Yes, it is believed that fully vaccinated people can transmit the virus. Parents of children 12+ should consider vaccination for their children. **The 3W's remain a top priority during this pandemic — please continue to wash your hands, wear a mask and watch your distance in public.**

Even after you've been vaccinated, please continue to follow the 3W's



Wash
your hands



Wear
a mask



Watch
your distance
(Stay 6 Feet Apart)



Q. Thank you for this information, Dr. Harris. Where can I learn more?

- ✓ For the most up-to-date information about COVID-19, including the delta variant, **visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.**

The information in this document is current as of August 11, 2021.
For the latest information on COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at CDC.gov.

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