

Fully Vaccinated Still Need to Consider Those Who Are Not

by Colleen Reynolds
March 11 2021 9:49 AM



Many people who are COVID weary and fully vaccinated might be a little disappointed by the latest guidelines from the federal government but one OSF HealthCare leader supports the cautious approach.

Stephen Hippler, M.D. is the chief clinical officer for Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare. He says more research is needed to see if vaccinated people can still become infected - yet not experience symptoms - and possibly spread the virus to others

who have not been vaccinated. Until then, he applauds [the latest updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) which allows fully vaccinated people to gather indoors without masks and physical distancing with people who are also fully vaccinated or if people from the same household have low risk of serious illness from the virus.

“Much is still unknown that now, being smart and being safe is probably the right approach. Even those of us who are fully vaccinated need to look out for others. Again, it’s about protecting others and our community in addition to protecting ourselves.”

People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after they have gotten their second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or two weeks after receiving the single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

The CDC warns that everyone — even those who are vaccinated — should continue to follow recommended guidelines in public settings, including wearing masks. Dr. Hippler points out that according to the CDC vaccine tracker, to date only 18.4% of the population has received one dose and only 9.7% has received both doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. He agrees with the CDC that “we’re just not there yet” to loosen restrictions any more.

“Moderate to large-size gatherings, at the gym, other large social venues, the guidelines still apply to wear the mask and physically distance so we’re not spreading it to other people who have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated yet.”

According to the CDC, even in a small gathering, if there are unvaccinated people who come from multiple households, there is a higher risk of virus transmission among them. Therefore, everyone should take precautions including wearing a well-fitted mask, staying at least 6 feet away from others, and visiting outdoors or in a well-ventilated space.

The guidance still suggests fully vaccinated people get tested and quarantine after a known exposure to someone with COVID-19 only if they have symptoms.

The CDC still recommends against unnecessary travel - a guideline that is sure to upset some who are fully vaccinated and aching to travel to see loved ones or who feel they need a vacation. Dr. Hippler says each individual has to determine for themselves what is necessary for their own mental health and wellbeing.

The agency does not give specific guidance for nursing homes. Dr. Hippler says some are allowing in-person visits but with ongoing mitigation measures to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. He suggests checking with your loved one’s facility.

There is no change in recommendations for those who have already had COVID-19 but aren't fully vaccinated. Some immunologists argue that people who've recovered should only need one dose of a vaccine. But, according to Dr. Hippler, the research isn't available to prove that's appropriate.

“I don't think we ought to be deviating from that (every eligible adult being fully vaccinated) until we have hard, firm data to suggest it's equally safe. Otherwise, it's just a hypothesis.”

The CDC guidelines for those who are fully vaccinated are interim and Dr. Hippler says they'll continue to evolve as more people are immunized against the virus and its variants, or until more research becomes available to suggest changes. Until then, he says, those who have a high level of protection through vaccination have an obligation to keep others safe as well.