

## 8 coronavirus tips that doctors wish patients would follow

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While more people continue to receive a COVID-19 vaccine—whether it is Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson-owned Janssen Pharmaceuticals—it does not mean people can return to their pre-pandemic lifestyles just yet. The COVID-19 vaccines are effective for those who get one, but they will be most effective once enough of the population has been vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. Until then, it remains imperative that everyone continue to follow preventive measures to minimize their risk and limit exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and its variants.

Even though authorized COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 infections, severe disease and death, the risks in fully vaccinated people cannot be completely eliminated. Vaccinated people could potentially still become infected and spread the virus to others. That is why it is important to continue to follow proper precautions, such as these eight key tips outlined below.

### **Maximize fit or double mask**

With the news of more contagious SARS-CoV-2 variants spreading across the U.S., further guidance has been released about mask wearing. Maximizing the fit of cloth and medical masks is key to improving performance as well as reducing transmission and exposure of SARS-CoV-2. But wearing two masks—or double masking—can also help protect against the threat of more contagious variants.

Learn more with the AMA about six things doctors wish patients knew about masks.

### **Watch your distance**

Physical distancing remains vital for limiting the spread of COVID-19. While physical distancing of at least six feet paired with wearing face masks and handwashing are everyday preventive actions that should be followed during the pandemic, patients are still uncertain about when these measures apply. Physicians want to help patients better understand when to practice physical distancing and how.

In this “AMA COVID-19 Update” interview, Hannah Kirking, MD, medical epidemiologist for the Division of Viral Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), discussed misperceptions regarding how COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person and what safety measures one should practice.

## **Wash your hands**

Keeping your hands clean is essential because of how often people touch their faces or rub their eyes, giving virus particles their pathway into the body.

“That sounds really simple. It’s not rocket science, but it can really be effective,” said Anthony S. Fauci, MD, a member of the White House coronavirus task force and director of the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. “It’s in our hands. ... You have the dynamics of the virus which, if left to its own devices, will keep resurging. The only way to stop it is what we do as a countermeasure. It can be done.”

Project Firstline—a collaborative effort involving the CDC, AMA, state and local health departments, medical and public health associations, health care organizations and academic institutions—provides resources to help physicians and other health professionals understand and confidently apply infection control principles and protocols including a video on hand hygiene.

## **Limit exposure, slow the spread**

“We are assuming that some patients with COVID-19 will have minimal symptoms or might not have symptoms and that they can infect other individuals that might be at higher risks for poor outcomes,” said Odaliz Abreu Lanfranco, MD, an infectious disease expert at Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, an AMA Health System Program Partner. “By slowing the spread of COVID-19, they help their providers be able to provide the

appropriate care because not everybody will come at once to the hospital.”

Watch this video from Project Firstline about how you can spread SARS-CoV-2 even when you don't feel sick.

## **Get vaccinated if you have not already**

Which COVID-19 vaccine did you get? This is a question that physicians and other health professionals continue to hear as vaccine rollout continues. While there are now three vaccines available that have received emergency use authorization in the United States—those made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson-owned Janssen Pharmaceuticals—it is less important which one a person gets. Instead, says a leading physician expert, it is imperative that everyone simply gets vaccinated.

## **Be aware of coronavirus variants**

New variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, are circulating in the U.S. and have raised international alarms as they continue to spread in other countries around the world. The emergence and rapid spread of at least three coronavirus variants has intensified the push to better understand how the novel coronavirus mutates and what this means for vaccine efficacy.

Variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 are circulating globally. Five of the current variants of concern in the U.S. are:

- | B.1.1.7, first identified in the United Kingdom, spreads more easily and quickly than other variants. This variant was detected in the U.S. in December.
- | B.1.351 emerged in South Africa and shares some mutations with B.1.1.7. This variant appeared in the U.S. at the end of January.
- | P.1 originated in Brazil and contains a set of additional mutations that may affect its ability to be recognized by antibodies. It was first detected in the U.S. at the end of January.
- | B.1.427, first detected in California, is about 20% more transmissible than other variants. It first appeared in July 2020.
- | B.1.429, which was also first identified in California and is 20% more transmissible than preexisting COVID-19 variants. This variant was detected in July 2020.

## **Travel with care**

Being crammed in an airplane with strangers for hours might seem like a flying petri dish during the COVID-19 pandemic. But as more people get vaccinated and COVID-19 cases decrease, many people are still contemplating booking a flight to visit family. While there are risks associated with flying, air travel may be safer than most think. To help clear up any confusion, physicians share further insight for patients on whether it is safe to fly.

The CDC offers updated guidance for travel during the COVID-19 pandemic for individuals who are fully vaccinated.

## **Protect your children**

Children infected with SARS-CoV-2 are often asymptomatic, said AMA member Tamaan Osbourne-Roberts, MD. That is why it's especially critical that children over 2 years of age wear masks to prevent spread of the virus to others. Children also are likelier to be together in small, enclosed spaces all at once. Dr. Osbourne-Roberts also outlined three keys to help parents and kids succeed with masks.

It is also important to note that temperature checks are not foolproof. In a statement outlining why the federal government is no longer requiring temperature checks for international air passengers, the CDC said: "We now have a better understanding of COVID-19 transmission that indicates symptom-based screening has limited effectiveness because people with COVID-19 may have no symptoms or fever at the time of screening, or only mild symptoms."

The AMA has developed a COVID-19 resource center as well as a physician's guide to COVID-19 to give doctors a comprehensive place to find the latest resources and updates from the CDC and the World Health Organization.