

What patients can—and cannot—do after being fully vaccinated

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What's the news: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released long-awaited interim guidance for what people can—and cannot—do after being fully vaccinated. The advice means fully vaccinated Americans should feel freer to socialize in person and pursue routine activities.

As defined by the CDC, people are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose series, such as the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines. If a person still needs a second dose, they are not fully protected. Full vaccination is also achieved two weeks after a single-dose vaccine such as that from Johnson & Johnson-owned Janssen Pharmaceuticals.

In a non-health care setting, the CDC recommendations provide that fully vaccinated people can:

- Visit with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing.
- Gather indoors with unvaccinated people from a single household who are at low risk for severe COVID-19 without wearing masks or physical distancing.
- Refrain from quarantine and testing following known exposure if asymptomatic, unless living in a group setting such as a correctional facility.

However, it is still imperative that fully vaccinated individuals continue to:

- Wear a well-fitted mask and practice physical distancing while in public.
- Adhere to all prevention measures when visiting with unvaccinated people who are at an increased risk for severe COVID-19.
- Avoid medium-sized or large in-person gatherings.
- Get tested if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Follow guidance at their workplaces.
- Follow CDC and health department travel requirements and recommendations.

Read about what doctors wish patients knew about COVID-19 vaccination.

Why it's important: As more adults get their COVID-19 vaccination—whether it is Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson—many are wondering if they will have greater freedom to visit family, travel and do other activities they have put on pause since the pandemic began. This comes at a time when people are experiencing pandemic fatigue as they yearn to safely resume normal activities.

The CDC's interim guidance is the first step in restoring some normalcy in how people can come together. Guidance will continue to be updated as COVID-19 cases and deaths decline, and more Americans are vaccinated. As science evolves and researchers learn more about whether those who have been vaccinated can get or spread the novel coronavirus, CDC guidance will be updated further.

Learn more: It is clear that SARS-CoV-2 vaccines are effective at preventing COVID-19, especially severe illness, hospitalization and death, says the CDC. But more needs to be known about the effectiveness of the vaccines against the coronavirus variants, including B.1.1.7, P.1 and B.1.351.

It is also important for everyone—even fully vaccinated individuals—to continue to follow basic prevention steps. These include:

- Wearing a mask.
- Washing hands often.
- Practicing physical distancing.
- Avoiding large crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.

The AMA has developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer patients' questions, and another to address physicians' COVID-19 vaccine questions.

Additionally, the AMA has created two explainer documents for patients covering COVID-19 transmission and wearing face masks.

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.