

## FAQ: Vaccination and the Delta Variant

NUHW strongly encourages all members to get vaccinated against Covid-19, a disease that has killed millions of people around the world including tens of thousands of healthcare workers. NUHW stands with medical professionals and public health experts who recommend vaccination as safe, and as the most effective way to protect people from Covid-19 and save countless lives.

With the more transmissible Delta variant causing rising infections, hospitalizations, and deaths across the country, the urgency for all eligible people (everyone 12 years and older) to get vaccinated is now greater than ever. **Getting vaccinated is the number one way you can protect yourself, your fellow healthcare workers, and your patients.**

Below are answers to some common questions about the Delta variant and Covid-19 vaccination. If you have additional questions, please reach out to your NUHW representative.

### What is the Delta variant?

The Delta variant (B.1.617.2) is a highly contagious strain of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes Covid-19). The Delta variant was first identified in India in December 2020, and it quickly spread around the world. Public health experts believe that the Delta variant (in conjunction with slowing rates of vaccine uptake) is causing the current increase in Covid-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths across the US.

### Why is the Delta variant so concerning?

The Delta variant is much more transmissible than previously identified variants of SARS-CoV-2. This means that people infected with the Delta variant can more easily spread it to other people through even minimal contact. For example, Australian health authorities documented an infection incident in which an individual unknowingly infected with the Delta variant passed it to a person they encountered in an indoor shopping mall for only seconds.

High transmissibility allows the Delta variant to spread faster and more effectively through a population, especially when the vaccination rate is low. This is why Delta has quickly become the dominant variant in the world.

Additionally, some reports indicate that Delta variant infections are presenting differently than infections from earlier strains of the virus. For example, some studies show that cough and loss of taste or smell are less common, while headache, sore throat, and runny nose are more frequent. This means some people may not realize they have Covid-19 and fail to get tested and isolate themselves to prevent spread.

### Is the Delta variant in the US?

Delta is now the dominant strain throughout the US, including California. On July 20, Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told a congressional

hearing that the Delta variant accounts for an estimated 83% of Covid-19 cases. This is up from 50% of cases at the beginning of July.

### **Do the vaccines work against the Delta variant?**

**Yes.** The vaccines continue to be the most effective way to prevent severe illness and death from all virus variants including the Delta variant. Currently, over 97 percent of people being hospitalized for Covid-19 are unvaccinated and 99 percent of deaths from Covid-19 are among the unvaccinated.

**Vaccination is also the best way to stop the spread of Covid-19 and prevent other more transmissible and dangerous variants from emerging.** The more the virus spreads from person to person the more chances it has to mutate and produce a new variant that can evade our immune system's defenses. If we want to win the battle against viral variants, as many people as are eligible must get vaccinated.

All eligible people getting vaccinated is also the best way we can protect children and immunocompromised people. Currently only people age 12 or over can get the vaccine, and some studies show the vaccine may be less effective in immunocompromised people. In turn, children and immunocompromised people need the protection conferred by the lower levels of circulating virus that results from all teens and adults being vaccinated. This is critically important, as immunocompromised people are at risk for more severe illness from Covid-19, and contrary to some myths circulating on the internet, children can and do get infected with Covid-19. Since the start of the pandemic in the US, over 4 million children have been infected, including thousands who have been hospitalized and hundreds who have died.

### **If I am vaccinated, does that mean it's impossible to get infected?**

**No.** While you can rest assured that the Covid-19 vaccines are incredibly effective at preventing severe illness and death, no vaccine is 100% effective and it is still possible to get infected after being vaccinated -- notably more so now in face of the highly transmissible Delta variant. Thankfully, the overwhelming majority of people who do have a "breakthrough infection" (an infection after being fully vaccinated) are asymptomatic or develop only mild symptoms. But because breakthrough infections occur, it is possible for fully vaccinated people to infect others. **This is why it is so important to continue all the other protective measures like symptom monitoring, testing, contact tracing, appropriate use of PPE, proper ventilation and filtration, and masking in public when recommended by public health officials.** These measures are particularly important in settings where the vaccination status of everyone is not known.

### **I was already infected with Covid-19. Do I still need to be vaccinated?**

**Yes.** Public health experts are unequivocal that previously infected individuals still need to be vaccinated. While there has been lots of misinformation on the internet saying previously infected people can't get Covid-19 again and that immunity from infection is stronger than from vaccination, there is no scientific evidence that these assertions are true. In contrast, there have been numerous well-documented cases of reinfection in previously infected people and studies

show that people who have been infected benefit from a strong and longer-lasting immunity boost after vaccination.

**The bottom line is that if you have previously been infected with Covid-19 you still need to get vaccinated and vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from reinfection, illness, hospitalization, and death.**

### **I got one dose of a two-dose vaccine. Do I need to get a second dose?**

**Yes.** If you only got your first dose of the two-dose Pfizer or Moderna vaccine you are missing out on the majority of the protection conferred by vaccination. For example, one dose of the Pfizer vaccine is only 33% effective against symptomatic disease from the Delta variant compared to over 80% effective after two doses. Decreased efficacy from skipping your second dose leaves you vulnerable to severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

If you received the Pfizer vaccine, you should get your second shot 3 weeks (or 21 days) after your first. If you received the Moderna vaccine, you should get your second shot 4 weeks (or 28 days) after your first. **But if it's been longer than the recommended three-week or four-week interval you can and should get your second dose.** Even with an extended interval between doses, your second dose will offer you important additional protection. You should schedule your second dose immediately.

### **As a healthcare worker, in addition to getting vaccinated, what else can I do to protect myself, my coworkers, and my patients from the Delta variant?**

While Covid-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths, no vaccine is 100% effective and many people in the US are still unvaccinated including children under 12. In turn, all the other layers of infection control must continue in healthcare settings.

These protections include symptom and exposure screening, testing and contact tracing, universal masking, PPE like N95 or elastomeric respirators for the care of suspected or confirmed Covid-19 patients (and PAPRs for aerosol generating procedures), cohorting, utilization of airborne infection isolation (negative pressure) rooms, and proper ventilation and filtration. Our union has fought hard to ensure that employers implement these essential protections and we will continue to do so. If your employer is failing to provide you or your coworkers with a safe work environment, please let your NUHW representative know immediately.

Additionally, many counties throughout California have now resumed urging even vaccinated people to wear masks in indoor public settings like grocery and other retail stores. In LA County, where the Delta variant has caused an alarming rise in infections and vaccination rates remain relatively low, the health department has made this a requirement.

**We encourage all NUHW members to follow guidance on masking from the public health experts in their community. Masking continues to be an easy, low cost and effective way to reduce the spread of Covid-19.**

Finally, vaccine hesitant people respond best to education and encouragement that comes from people they know well and trust. **As a healthcare worker you are a trusted and respected member of your community.** We encourage you to draw on your experience on the frontlines of the pandemic to urge your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to get vaccinated. **We all want this pandemic to end as soon as possible and the advocacy of healthcare workers is a key way to get us there.**

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**NUHW's CE Course on the Vaccine:**

If you are interested in learning more about the Covid-19 vaccine please take our CE Course, "COVID-19 Vaccines Save Lives" [here](#).