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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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How the Delta variant upends assumptions about the coronavirus

July 26 (Reuters) - The Delta variant is the fastest, fittest and most formidable version of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 the world has encountered, and it is upending assumptions about the disease even as nations loosen restrictions and open their economies, according to virologists and epidemiologists.

Vaccine protection remains very strong against severe infections and hospitalizations caused by any version of the coronavirus, and those most at risk are still the unvaccinated, according to interviews with 10 leading COVID-19 experts.

The major worry about the Delta variant, first identified in India, is not that it makes people sicker, but that it spreads far more easily from person to person, increasing infections and hospitalizations among the unvaccinated.

Evidence is also mounting that it is capable of infecting fully vaccinated people at a greater rate than previous versions, and concerns have been raised that they may even spread the virus, these experts said.

“The biggest risk to the world at the moment is simply Delta,” said microbiologist Sharon Peacock, who runs Britain’s efforts to sequence the genomes of coronavirus variants, calling it the “fittest and fastest variant yet.”

Viruses constantly evolve through mutation, with new variants arising. Sometimes these are more dangerous than the original.

Until there is more data on Delta variant transmission, disease experts say that masks, social distancing and other measures set aside in countries with broad vaccination campaigns may again be needed.

Public Health England said on Friday that out of a total of 3,692 people hospitalized in Britain with the Delta variant, 58.3% were unvaccinated and 22.8% were fully vaccinated.



In Singapore, where Delta is the most common variant, government officials reported on Friday that three quarters of its coronavirus cases occurred among vaccinated individuals, though none were severely ill.

Israeli health officials have said 60% of current hospitalized COVID cases are in vaccinated people. Most of them are age 60 or older and often have underlying health problems.

In the United States, which has experienced more COVID-19 cases and deaths than any other country, the Delta variant represents about 83% of new infections. So far, unvaccinated people represent nearly 97% of severe cases.

“There is always the illusion that there is a magic bullet that will solve all our problems. The coronavirus is teaching us a lesson,” said Nadav Davidovitch, director of Ben Gurion University’s school of public health in Israel.

‘TEACHING US A LESSON’

The Pfizer Inc (PFE.N)/BioNTech vaccine, one of the most effective against COVID-19 so far, appeared only 41% effective at halting symptomatic infections in Israel over the

past month as the Delta variant spread, according to Israeli government data. Israeli experts said this information requires more analysis before conclusions can be drawn.

“Protection for the individual is very strong; protection for infecting others is significantly lower,” Davidovitch said.

A study in China found that people infected with the Delta variant carry 1,000 times more virus in their noses compared with the ancestral Wuhan strain first identified in that Chinese city in 2019.

“You may actually excrete more virus and that’s why it’s more transmissible. That’s still being investigated,” Peacock said.

Virologist Shane Crotty of the La Jolla Institute for Immunology in San Diego noted that Delta is 50% more infectious than the Alpha variant first detected in the UK.

“It’s outcompeting all other viruses because it just spreads so much more efficiently,” Crotty added.

Genomics expert Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in La Jolla, California, noted that Delta infections have a shorter incubation period and a far higher

amount of viral particles.

“That’s why the vaccines are going to be challenged. The people who are vaccinated have got to be especially careful. This is a tough one,” Topol said.

In the United States, the Delta variant has arrived as many Americans - vaccinated and not - have stopped wearing masks indoors.

“It’s a double whammy,” Topol said. “The last thing you want is to loosen restrictions when you’re confronting the most formidable version of the virus yet.”

The development of highly effective vaccines may have led many people to believe that once vaccinated, COVID-19 posed little threat to them.

“When the vaccines were first developed, nobody was thinking that they were going to prevent infection,” said Carlos del Rio, a professor of medicine and infectious disease epidemiology at Emory University in Atlanta. The aim was always to prevent severe disease and death, del Rio added.

The vaccines were so effective, however, that there were signs the vaccines also prevented transmission against prior coronavirus variants.

“We got spoiled,” del Rio said.

Dr. Monica Gandhi, an infectious diseases doctor at the University of California, San Francisco, said, “People are so disappointed

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

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The Road to Recovery Is Moving Forward

It was the most successful ILF's Virtual Business and Leadership Conference since 2020. Many in the AANHPI community have faced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and also from anti-Asian violence and hate crimes.

Former Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao was the keynote speaker of the dialogue along with two Korean-American congresswomen, Young Kim

and Michelle Steel who shared their hard journey to the U.S. Congress.

U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Kathrine Tai, Congresswomen Judy Chu and Grace Meng were among the speakers who discussed the future of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. All of the topics were so important for us especially in this very difficult time.

The International Leadership



2021 Civic Fellows

Foundation was founded by Ms. Chiling Tong many years ago. She was the one who really went all over the country to try and convince people to give their support to the foundation. In the last several years, the ILF has not just brought in a lot of young Asians who want to work in the federal government as interns, but also those that desire to build a very strong

bridge between Asian businesses and government to help many of them to become successful businesses.

We really admire Chiling Tong's hard work and wish ILF continuing success in serving our community. We all need to support this organization.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Chase Kalisz of the United States celebrates after winning the gold medal in the 400m individual medley at the Tokyo Olympics. REUTERS/Antonio Bronic



A helicopter is being filled up with water from a tank as a wildfire burns near the village of Spathovouni, near Corinth, Greece. REUTERS/Vassilis Psomas



A man on crutches moves away from tear gas thrown by police during a protest to demand the impeachment of Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro and against his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, at Consolacao street in Sao Paulo, Brazil. REUTERS/Amanda Perobelli



People pray as screens show devotees gathering via Zoom application during a ceremony to commemorate the Buddhist Lent Day at the Wat Phra Dhammakaya temple in Pathum Thani province, Thailand. REUTERS/Chalinee Thirasupa



Relatives and the mother of Palestinian Mohammed Al-Tamimi, who was killed by Israeli forces during clash on Friday, according to officials, mourn during his funeral in Deir Nidham in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman



People form the foundation of a human tower during the first performance of Colla Joves Xiquets de Valls and Colla Vella Dels Xiquets de Valls after the coronavirus pandemic halt, at Blat square in Valls, Spain. REUTERS/ Albert Gea

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

CDC: Vaccinated People OK To Take Masks Off Indoors And Outdoors



The CDC has updated their guidance for people who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 who now can go without masks indoors and outdoors.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

People who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can safely resume life without any restrictions, according to long-awaited federal guidance released Thursday.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if you are fully vaccinated — two weeks past the last required COVID-19 vaccine dose — you don't need to wear masks indoors or outside, and you don't need to maintain physical distance.

"The science is clear: if you are fully vaccinated, you are protected, and you can start doing the things that you stopped doing because of the pandemic," CDC said.

Essentially, for vaccinated people, life can begin to return to normal.

The new guidelines do not apply to health care settings, correctional facilities or homeless shelters, the agency said.

The CDC said fully vaccinated people should still wear well-fitted masks where required by laws, rules and regulations, including on airplanes, trains and public

transportation.



The update comes as the agency has been criticized for being too slow to react to changing science, overly cautious, and even contradictory in its recommendations to the public.

States across the country have been easing restrictions and reopening businesses as local vaccination rates increase, despite the CDC and federal health officials who continued to urge caution.

Health experts said they feared the agency's overly conservative approach could result in fewer people getting shots, if they failed to show the benefits of being vaccinated.

The agency relaxed some of its rules for fully vaccinated people last month, but still advised wearing masks indoors in most public

settings, and in many outdoors places. That guidance included an elaborate color-coded chart for various activities that was widely mocked for being confusing and contradictory.

The agency's recent guidance on summer camps was also panned as being overly restrictive.

The CDC said masks should be worn at all times, even outdoors, by everyone, including vaccinated adults and children as young as 2 years old.

The CDC denied that the changes were being made because of the criticism, and insisted the agency was following the science.

Additional data in the past few weeks has shown the effectiveness of the vaccines in the real world, the vaccines work against variants, and vaccinated people are unlikely to transmit the virus.



But as recently as Wednesday evening, the message hadn't changed. CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said during an interview with CNBC's Shepard Smith that masks were still advised for people indoors, even if they were fully vaccinated, because the science wasn't clear if the vaccine worked against COVID-19 variants, or whether vaccinated people were asymptomatic carriers. (Courtesy thehill.com)

Related

Updated CDC Guidance Says People Vaccinated Against Covid-19 Can Go Without

Masks Indoors And Outdoors

(CNN) People fully vaccinated against Covid-19 do not need to wear masks or practice social distancing indoors or outdoors, except under certain circumstances, the director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Thursday.

"If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing the things that you had stopped

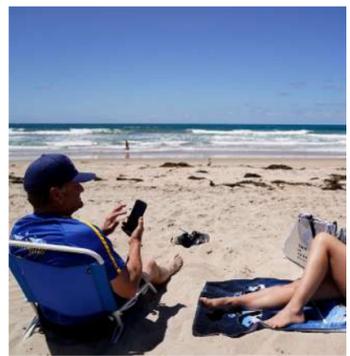
doing because of the pandemic," Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a White House Covid-19 briefing. "We have all longed for this moment when we can get back to some sense of normalcy."



Walensky said the science supports the new recommendation that "anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities -- large or small -- without wearing a mask or physical distancing." She cited three studies -- one from Israel and one from the United States -- that show vaccines work.

The Israeli study, which was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, showed the vaccine was 97% effective against symptomatic Covid-19 and 86% effective against asymptomatic infection in over 5,000 health care workers.

There have been reports of "breakthrough" infections among vaccinated people in the United States -- a small number among more than 117 million people in the United States who are now fully vaccinated. Walensky noted that "the resulting infection is more likely to have a lower viral load, may be shorter in duration, and likely less risk of transmission to others."



Walensky's announcement has a few ca-

veats. She warned that people who are immune compromised should speak with their doctors before giving up their masks. She also said that "the past year has shown us that this virus can be unpredictable, so if things get worse, there is always a chance we may need to make a change to these recommendations." (Courtesy cnn.com)



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COMMUNITY

Hospitals Are Seeing More Young Adults With Severe Covid Symptoms, CDC Says



Key Points

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said hospitals are seeing more and more younger adults with severe Covid-19.

"Data suggests this is all happening as we are seeing increasing prevalence of variants, with 52 jurisdictions now reporting cases of variants of concern," Walensky said.

The B.1.1.7 variant has since spread and now accounts for more than 16,000 cases across 52 jurisdictions in the country.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Hospitals are seeing more and more younger adults in their 30s and 40s admitted with severe cases of Covid-19, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said Wednesday.

"Data suggests this is all happening as we are seeing increasing prevalence of variants, with 52 jurisdictions now reporting cases of variants of concern," Walensky said at a press briefing on the pandemic.

Scientists say new variants of the coronavirus are more transmittable and some of them may be more lethal as well, resulting in more severe cases. The highly contagious B.1.1.7 variant from the United Kingdom has become the dominant strain circulating in the United States, Walensky said.



Walensky previously warned that traveling for spring break could lead to another rise in cases, especially in Florida where the variant was rapidly spreading.

"I'm pleading with you, for the sake of our nation's health," Walensky said at a briefing last month. "Cases climbed last spring, they climbed again in the summer, they will climb now if we

stop taking precautions when we continue to get more and more people vaccinated."

The B.1.1.7 variant has since spread and now accounts for more than 16,000 cases across 52 jurisdictions in the country. The variant is about 50% more transmissible than the original wild strain of the coronavirus. (Courtesy cnbc.com)

Related

States and Cities Look to Schools, Camps, Even Beaches To Vaccinate Younger Teens



Covid shots being administered by a health program in Denver that works with schools to vaccinate older teenagers — and soon, younger ones — at health clinics it runs in six public schools. (Photo/Kevin Mohatt for The New York Times)

Key Point

The F.D.A.'s authorization of Pfizer's Covid shot for 12- to 15-year-olds is a milestone in battling the coronavirus, but actually getting them vaccinated involves new challenges.

The race is on to vaccinate the nation's nearly 17 million 12- to 15-year-olds against Covid-19. The Food and Drug Administration's decision on Monday to authorize the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for younger adolescents presents a new opportunity in the push for broad immunity against the coronavirus in the United States. But the challenges of getting them vaccinated are more complicated than for adults and older teenagers.

"The game changes when you go down as young as 12 years old," said Nathan Quesnel, the superintendent of schools in East Hartford, Conn., adding, "You need to have a different level of sensitivity."

A recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation's Vaccine Monitor found that many parents — even some who eagerly got their own Covid shots — are reluctant to vaccinate pubescent children. Yet doing so will be critical for further reducing transmission of the virus, smoothly reopening middle and high schools and regaining some sense of national normalcy. Vaccination for the age group is expected to begin across the

country later this week. Sites are anticipating an initial surge in demand before an inevitable softening, much as happened with adults.



A vial of the Pfizer vaccine at the Denver School of Science and Technology Green Valley Ranch this month. (Photo/Kevin Mohatt for The New York Times)

Sites are anticipating an initial surge in demand before an inevitable softening, much as happened with adults.

States, counties and school districts around the country are trying to figure out the most reassuring and expedient ways to reach younger adolescents as well as their parents, whose consent is usually required by state law. They are making plans to offer vaccines not only in schools, but also at pediatricians' offices, day camps, parks and even beaches.

Children's Minnesota, a Minneapolis-based hospital system where the main Covid vaccination site has offered stress balls, colored lights and images of playful dolphins projected on the ceiling, is planning to provide shots beginning later this week in at least a dozen middle schools and a Y.W.C.A.



In Columbus, Ohio, public health nurses will drive a mobile vaccination unit around neighborhoods "just like you would an ice cream truck," said Dr. Mysheika Roberts, the city health commissioner. In Connecticut, Community Health Center, a statewide primary care provider that vaccinated the busloads of high school seniors, is aiming to reach younger adolescents by offering shots at amusement parks, beaches and camps, among other locales.

"You're going to Dollar General?" said Yvette Highsmith-Francis, a vice president of Community Health Center. "Guess what? We're in the

parking lot." But with the school year ending soon, many health officials are racing against the academic clock to schedule both recommended doses, seeing schools as the best place to reach many students at once.

"We have a very finite amount of time," said Dr. Anne Zink, the chief medical officer for Alaska. "In Alaska, kids go to the wind as soon as summer hits, so our opportunity to get them is now."

A number of places are revving up vaccination efforts in schools. In Colorado, Denver Health will expand clinics it operates in six public schools to middle school students. For the last few weeks, it has provided 150 to 400 vaccines every Saturday and Sunday, reaching not just high school juniors and seniors but sometimes their parents and older siblings, too.

"It's been really successful because we are doing it in their communities, where the kids are familiar," said Dr. Sonja O'Leary, the medical director for Denver Health's school-based health centers.



Other states believe pediatricians' and family doctors' offices will be the best places to catch teenagers — and children as young as infants as companies plan eventually to seek authorization for the shots to be given to the youngest children. Until recently, few doctors had vaccines on hand for patients. But in recent weeks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has made a major push to enroll pediatricians to give the shots.

The thinking is that pediatricians are in the best position to field questions from parents and children. Not only are they experienced in giving routine childhood vaccinations, but they are also often a household's most trusted source of health information.

President Biden announced plans last week to ship doses of the Pfizer vaccine directly to pediatricians' offices, and he said that about 20,000 pharmacy sites were also ready to administer the vaccine to younger adolescents. (Courtesy nytimes.com)