

# COVID-19 Update

## August 5: NM Updates Mask Guidelines, CDC Interim Guidelines for Fully Vaccinated People, CDC Alert to Increase Vaccination Coverage, FSM Vaccination Requirements, and NM Visitor Policy Reminder

*Today's issue features information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on interim public health guidelines for fully vaccinated individuals, as well as an alert to healthcare providers about the importance of increasing vaccination coverage to prevent surges in new infections. It also includes details about the implications of Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine vaccination requirements for NM physicians, and a reminder about NM visitor and companion policies.*

### **NM UPDATES MASK GUIDELINES TO ALIGN WITH CDC RECOMMENDATIONS**

NM has relied on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance throughout the pandemic to keep our physicians, workforce, patients and visitors safe. The CDC recently updated masking recommendations based on research that shows that fully vaccinated individuals can spread the highly transmissible COVID-19 delta variant. In response, NM is updating masking guidelines to align with CDC recommendations. The new guidelines will be posted tomorrow on [Physician Forum](#) and [NM Interactive](#) (login required). Capacity limits, physical distancing and other guidelines remain unchanged.

### **CDC INTERIM PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION FOR FULLY VACCINATED INDIVIDUALS**

On July 27, the CDC released updated [Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People](#), and on July 28, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) released a Siren Notification announcing that Illinois has fully adopted the CDC guidelines. Below is an overview of the new recommendations. **Please note that these recommendations apply to non-healthcare settings.**

Currently authorized vaccines in the U.S. are highly effective at protecting vaccinated people against symptomatic and severe COVID-19. Fully vaccinated people are less likely to become infected and, if infected, to develop symptoms of COVID-19. They are at substantially reduced risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 compared with unvaccinated people.

Infections in fully vaccinated people (breakthrough infections) are uncommon, even with the delta variant. Moreover, when these infections occur among vaccinated people, they tend to be mild. However, **preliminary evidence** suggests that fully vaccinated individuals who become infected with the delta variant are infectious and can spread the virus to others.

### **Guiding Principles for Fully Vaccinated People**

- Outdoor activities pose minimal risk to fully vaccinated people.
- Most indoor activities pose low risk to fully vaccinated people, especially in areas with low or moderate transmission.
- Infections develop in only a small proportion of people who are fully vaccinated, even with the delta variant.
- Fully vaccinated people who become infected with the delta variant can transmit it to others.

To reduce the risk of becoming infected with the delta variant and potentially spreading it to others, CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people:

- Wear a mask in public indoor settings if they are in an area of substantial or high transmission.
  - Fully vaccinated people might choose to mask regardless of the level of transmission, particularly if they or someone in their household is immunocompromised or at increased risk for severe disease, or if someone in their household is unvaccinated.
- Get tested if they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior 10 days or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Get tested three to five days after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days after exposure or until they receive a negative test result.

For the complete list of CDC guidelines for fully vaccinated individuals, please visit the [Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People page](#) on the CDC website.

### **VACCINATION COVERAGE**

On July 27, the CDC issued a Health Alert Network Health Advisory to notify public health practitioners and clinicians about the urgent need to increase COVID-19 vaccination coverage across the U.S. Increasing vaccination coverage is especially urgent in areas where current coverage is low. Unvaccinated persons account for the majority of new COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths. Currently circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, especially the highly infectious delta variant (B.1.617.2), are accelerating spread of infection. Unvaccinated and partially vaccinated people are encouraged to follow all recommended prevention measures until fully vaccinated. In areas with substantial and high transmission, CDC recommends that fully vaccinated individuals wear a mask in public indoor settings to help prevent the spread of the delta variant and protect others.

For information about patient vaccinations available across NM, please visit the [Patient Vaccine Toolkit page](#) on Physician Forum or [NMI](#) (login required).

### **FEINBERG SCHOOL OF MEDICINE VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS**

Recently, physicians who hold faculty positions with Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine received a communication regarding vaccination requirements for faculty and staff of the university. Please complete the form as requested. These requirements do not impact privileges at any Northwestern Medicine hospital.

For more information about NM workforce vaccinations, please visit the [Workforce Vaccination Information](#) page on Physician Forum or [NMI](#) (login required).

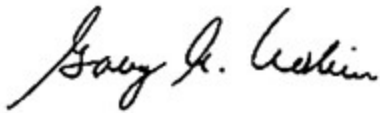
**REMINDER: NM VISITOR AND COMPANION POLICIES**

Visitors are important to a patient’s recovery. As part of the NM focus on patient-centered care, it is important to continue allowing inpatient visitors to provide comfort and support to our patients. We also understand that allowing visitors can bring risks. To maintain a safe and trusted care environment, we have developed stronger language around our face mask policy, including alerting visitors that they may be asked to leave if they do not comply with this policy.

Please visit the [Special Visitor Policies Due to COVID-19 page](#) on nm.org to view the latest visitor restrictions across the health system.

---

Over the past several weeks, COVID-19 cases have been increasing in the Chicagoland area. The vast majority of patients admitted to NM hospitals with COVID-19 are unvaccinated. The currently available vaccines are protective against the delta variant and are an effective way to prevent infection. Continuing to encourage vaccination among our colleagues and patients is the most effective method to prevent hospitalizations and deaths among unvaccinated individuals.



**Gary A. Noskin, MD**  
Senior Vice President, Quality  
Northwestern Memorial HealthCare  
Chief Medical Officer  
Northwestern Memorial Hospital