



Delta variant COVID has evolved and so must we

By Dr. Lakshmi Dhanvanthari

The latest variant of COVID is more infectious than the strain we have been confronting for more than a year. Regardless of vaccination status or previous COVID infection, anyone can carry and infect others with the virus. Those who remain unvaccinated against COVID are at greater risk for severe illnesses and hospitalization. Evidence shows the Delta variant causes more infections and spreads more rapidly than the initial strain of COVID. This is not the same virus we were fighting months ago.

While few vaccinated people experience symptoms of COVID, most vaccinated carriers are asymptomatic and unlikely to get sick enough to go to the hospital or die. Over half of all Americans are fully vaccinated and the vaccine is continuing to do its job, protecting people against the worst consequences of COVID. Currently, 99% of the people hospitalized for COVID are NOT vaccinated.

Young adults are presenting more often with COVID symptoms due to lower vaccination rates and predominance of the Delta variant. Infection rates among children also are increasing with the Delta variant. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes in its latest update, "More than 4 million children have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) in the United States." Although young adults and children may experience less severe illness than other populations, COVID can cause many complications that may be chronic and severe, regardless of initial disease severity.

Protect yourself and others from COVID. Consider information from trusted sources on the COVID vaccine. If you are NOT vaccinated... Talk with your health care provider to determine whether being vaccinated against COVID is right for the health of you and your loved ones. Ask, learn, then decide for yourself based on the facts. If you are partly vaccinated, you can get fully protected by receiving the second dose.

Both doses of the COVID vaccine are vital to optimizing its effectiveness.

Those who received the first shot may still get the second, even if it has been a while between shots. You do not need to restart the vaccine series if you missed your scheduled second dose. To help you decide, reliable resources include your healthcare provider, County Public Health Services, for San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, California Department of Public Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; California Medical Association, HPSJ Myth Busters, COVID-19 Vaccines

Masks protect us all. We know the Delta variant can infect everyone; continuing to adopt the habit of wearing a mask to cover the nose and mouth is the best chance to protect those at greatest risk for severe COVID infection – the unvaccinated, young children, and those with underlying health concerns.

Physical distancing and frequent

hand washing are additional habits that have guarded us from COVID, as well as the flu and other preventable illnesses.

Avoid crowded places. Not only are vaccinated and unvaccinated attendees likely to spread the virus to each other, events where there is cheering, or singing can easily become super-spreader events.

99.5% of hospital deaths from COVID are among NOT vaccinated people. One of the most tragic messages we hear from health care providers is the number of patients hospitalized with COVID who are pleading for vaccinations at a stage in the illness too late to be effective. Being vaccinated against COVID may prevent the illness, but it is not a form of treatment once someone gets sick.

As COVID evolves, so must we. Practical actions to protect ourselves and loved ones can help us from severe COVID infections, save lives, and eventually beat the virus.