

July 21, 2021

HEALTH ADVISORY:

Delta Variant
Breakthrough

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This document will be updated as new information becomes available.

St. Louis County Department of Public Health (DPH) is now using 4 types of documents to provide important information to medical and public health professionals, and to other interested persons:

Health Alerts convey information of the highest level of importance which warrants immediate action or attention from Missouri health providers, emergency responders, public health agencies, and/or the public.

Health Advisories provide important information for a specific incident or situation, including that impacting neighboring states; may not require immediate action.

Health Guidances contain comprehensive information pertaining to a particular disease or condition, and include recommendations, guidelines, etc. endorsed by DPH.

Health Updates provide new or updated information on an incident or situation; can also provide information to update a previously sent Health Alert, Health Advisory, or Health Guidance; unlikely to require immediate action.

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**FROM: Dr. Faisal Khan, Acting Director
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SUBJECT: Delta Variant Breakthrough

COVID-19 infections continue to increase at an alarming rate. The St. Louis County Department of Public Health (DPH) issued Public Health Advisories on July 1, 2021 and July 12, 2021 warning of significant increases of COVID-19 infection in unvaccinated residents and among children, who are transmitting the infection much more easily than last year. The Delta variant is likely responsible for this changing picture. The purpose of this advisory is to inform the public of an emerging trend in COVID-19 infection among fully vaccinated people.

While infection in fully vaccinated individuals is still very uncommon, we have seen a recent increase in the number of vaccinated people who get COVID-19. DPH data shows that 35 St. Louis County residents who were fully vaccinated got COVID-19 in March 2021. That number increased to 213 in June 2021. Many factors, including who is getting interviewed and tested, could affect this number.

At this time we do not yet know the full significance and cause of this increase, but it is a noted trend and you may be hearing about it in your community.

Early on, COVID infection in fully vaccinated individuals was seen mainly among healthcare workers; now it has gradually shifted to the general population and to older people. In many cases, a vaccinated person is exposed to someone with COVID-19 who is unvaccinated within the same household. This suggests that continuous, unmasked exposure to the virus in large quantities may strain the protection that the vaccine provides.

Think of the COVID-19 vaccine as a suit of armor that will reduce the possibility of injury from attack. It may not protect you 100% of the time if you have significant and repeated exposures to the virus. The COVID-19 vaccine is not an impenetrable shield, but it is the best tool we have to fight the virus and it is highly effective. The good news is that when someone who is vaccinated gets COVID-19, that individual gets much less sick, rarely requires hospitalization and almost never will die.

It is also important to remember that vaccination is only one of several tools to protect oneself from infection. Masking, avoiding being around those who are not vaccinated and separating yourself from others who are sick also reduces your risk of getting COVID-19, whether you are vaccinated or unvaccinated. At this time, the CDC, FDA and DPH do not recommend COVID-19 booster vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccines are extraordinary suits of armor – in April and May, our data shows that those who were vaccinated were 86% less likely to get COVID-19 than those who were unvaccinated. As such, we continue to urge all eligible St. Louis County residents to get vaccinated immediately. In addition, DPH recommends the following:

1. Regardless of vaccination status, wear a face covering in indoor public places when the vaccination status of those around you is unknown.
2. While getting yourself vaccinated offers protection, you are most protected if those with whom you live and spend time are also vaccinated. Support your family and friends in getting vaccinated. Even one unvaccinated person in a household or social group can put everyone at risk.
3. People with risk factors for severe COVID-19 infection (older people and those with chronic medical conditions) are still most likely to have the worst outcomes from getting the infection. If you live with someone who is at high risk for complications from COVID-19, even if they are vaccinated, you are putting them at risk if you are unvaccinated. Get vaccinated to protect those you love.
4. If someone in your household tests positive for COVID-19, to the extent possible, they should isolate from others in the home, regardless of the vaccination status of everyone in the home. If you are caring for someone with COVID-19, wear a mask.