

# Here's why you should wear a mask even after getting COVID-19 or the vaccine

Getting a vaccine doesn't exempt you from mask-wearing and social distancing right now.

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It's best to wear a mask, even after you get vaccinated.

Sarah Tew/CNET

For the most up-to-date news and information about the

coronavirus pandemic, visit the [WHO website](#).

This month, the [Pfizer](#) and [Moderna vaccines were authorized](#) by the Food and Drug Administration for emergency use in the US. Since Dec. 14, the [COVID-19 vaccine](#) doses have started being administered throughout the states. If you think that after you receive [both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine](#), you won't have to worry about [wearing a mask](#) or social distancing, think again.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it's important to [continue following the protection guidelines in place](#) while experts learn more about the protection the [COVID-19 vaccines](#) provide, the possibility of vaccinated people continuing to spread the disease and more about immunity and reinfection if someone has recovered from COVID-19.

Here's what health experts and the CDC have to say about why you need to continue wearing a mask and social distancing [after you get the COVID-19 vaccine](#).

**Read more:** [COVID-19 vaccines are safe, even without long-term data](#)

**Now playing:** Will a COVID-19 vaccine be a triumph of science or soul-searching?

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**The COVID-19 vaccine may not give you full**

# protection right away

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines come in two doses -- the first shot starts building protection, while the second shot is needed to get the most protection the vaccine has to offer against the [coronavirus, according to the CDC](#).

The first shot has been [proven to be highly effective](#), Dr. Iahn Gonsenhauser, chief quality and patient safety officer of Wexner Medical Center, told CNET. He said the second dose amplifies the protection and will extend the life of immunity.

After you receive the second shot, your body needs time to build the protection needed to fight the virus. It could take up to two weeks for [your COVID-19 vaccine](#) to begin protecting you against the coronavirus, [according to the CDC](#). During that time, it's important to keep yourself and those around you safe by continuing to socially distance and wear a mask when around people outside your household.



You may not get full protection from the coronavirus right away.

Sarah Tew/CNET

## **You could still spread COVID-19, even after getting vaccinated**

Because the coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccine are both so new, there's not enough evidence at this point to know if people can still carry the coronavirus pathogens and pass them along to others without being infected themselves.

"This gives enough time for the virus to grow in the respiratory passages and spread the infection to others, all while the body is fighting its own infection, aided by the vaccine," Gonsenhauser told CNET.

There's a lack of data that shows whether or not a vaccinated individual can [spread the virus after becoming infected](#), and a person could potentially be an [asymptomatic carrier](#), he added.

"While the vaccine is highly effective, there's still a slim chance -- 5 to 10% -- that after someone gets vaccinated, they could become infected," Gonsenhauser said. However, more data could become available as scientists and doctors learn more about the effects of the vaccine on COVID-19.

**Read more:** [COVID-19 reinfection: Can you get the coronavirus more than once? What we know so far](#)

Until experts fully understand the protection a COVID-19 vaccine provides, it's important to continue wearing a mask and following social distancing protocols, [the CDC says](#). This can help prevent the coronavirus spread among communities of people until more of the population is vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Wearing a mask is "adding on the protection of the vaccination," Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, [said Dec. 14 on a CBS radio affiliate](#). The CDC says that together, wearing a face mask and getting vaccinated will [offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19](#).

**There are still unknowns about reinfection and 'natural' immunity**

"The immune response, including duration of immunity, to COVID-19 is not yet understood," [the CDC says](#).

More research is needed to determine how likely you are to get reinfected, and [the CDC says](#) "it's not known what antibody levels are needed to protect against reinfection."

The defenses the body gains against the virus during and after infection seem to fade relatively quickly, making it difficult to achieve [herd immunity](#) over a longer period of time, [according to Dr. William Haseltine](#), a former professor of Harvard Medical School who is renowned for his work on the [human genome and HIV/AIDS](#).

"The bigger concern is someone becoming reinfected with the same variant of COVID-19, not getting sick themselves, but still being contagious to others. You can get infected twice and be asymptomatic the second time around, and still carry it and transmit it to other more vulnerable people around you," [said John V. Williams](#), professor of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh.

So far, there have been very few cases of [reinfection of the coronavirus](#). In fact, reported cases of reinfection with COVID-19 remain rare, [according to the CDC](#). However, if COVID-19 is like other types of coronaviruses, such as the common cold, reinfection will become more prevalent as time goes on, [according to Scientific American](#).



Reinfection of COVID-19 is a possibility.

Sarah Tew/CNET

## Unvaccinated people might think it's okay to stop wearing a mask

It's going to take months or longer for enough of the population to be vaccinated to start seeing case numbers go down substantially. Therefore, it's important to continue wearing masks whenever you're around people outside your household.

"If after getting vaccinated, people stop wearing their masks, other people who haven't been vaccinated could start thinking masks aren't necessary anymore," Gonsenhauser said of social behavior. If those unvaccinated people have the virus, they can spread it

faster by not wearing a mask.

**Read more:** [COVID-19 vaccine card is not an immunity passport.](#)  
[Here's the difference](#)

People in smaller groups are less likely to wear masks when together, [according to a Vox survey](#) first published in November. Thirty two percent of respondents said they don't wear a mask when attending a sit-down gathering.

"Masks are a key measure to suppress transmission and save lives," [the World Health Organization says](#). If 95% of the public wears a mask, tens of thousands of lives could be saved, [according to a Nature Medicine study](#) from October.

## **If many Americans refuse the vaccine, wearing a mask can help you protect yourself**

Despite the [COVID-19 vaccines being proven safe](#), some Americans may avoid vaccination. Incorrect [coronavirus vaccine myths](#) and other misinformation have falsely claimed that the vaccine will include government-tracking microchips or be forcefully administered by the military. This is not true.

Some may be wrongly concerned that the vaccine was developed too quickly to be safe. Both vaccines in the US have [undergone extensive clinical trials](#) and have been proven to be 94% and 95%

effective, well over the 90% efficacy threshold required.

While a vaccine won't completely stop the pandemic in its tracks, it's the direct route to [herd immunity](#). However, in order to get there, more people will need to get the coronavirus vaccine. And, due to a limited number of doses, not everyone is able to get the coronavirus vaccine all at once. In fact, [depending on which group you're in](#), you may be waiting until at least April to get the vaccine, [according to Dr. Anthony Fauci](#), the top US infectious disease expert -- if not later.

If a significant portion of the population refuses to take the vaccine, we will likely not see numbers of new cases decrease as rapidly as we'd like, says Gonsenhauser. He says he and other medical providers are doing everything they can to remind people [how safe the vaccine is](#) -- from bringing relatable and accessible information to communities who have different oppositions to distrust the vaccine, to help them make better-informed decisions.



Some people may think it's okay not to wear a mask after getting COVID-19.

Sarah Tew/CNET

## How much longer will I have to wear a mask and social distance? What needs to happen?

Currently, there's not enough information at this time to determine if or when the majority of the population can safely stop wearing masks and avoid close contact with others to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, [the CDC says](#), but it will likely come down to the numbers.

When there are enough [observable changes](#), such as cases dropping and the threat levels of community spread sharply

falling. When that happens, medical experts can redetermine the need for mask-wearing. However, it could be well into 2021 before that happens.

"We would need to see a dramatic decrease in the number of new cases per 100,000 of the population after enough vaccines have been administered," Gonsenhauser said.

For more information, here are the [COVID-19 vaccine side effects and what we know so far](#), and [hidden medical charges you could encounter after getting the vaccine](#). Also, [here's where you can get the COVID-19 vaccine when it's your turn](#).

**Watch this:** Vaccines, antibody tests, treatments: The science of..

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