

Why Do You Have to Wear a Mask Even After Getting the COVID Vaccine? | Health.com

An effective vaccine is the first big step toward ending the coronavirus pandemic, and that's exactly what's being rolled out across the US right now. But our days of wearing face masks aren't over yet. While both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are more than 90% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19, we still don't know whether they prevent you from spreading the virus to other people. That's why experts strongly advise that everyone mask up, and that includes anyone who has received the vaccine.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna trials tracked only how many vaccinated people became sick with COVID-19, meaning it's completely possible that some vaccinated people could subsequently get infected but not develop any symptoms. Those people could then transmit the virus without being aware of it, and the biggest risk is that they spread it to others who haven't been vaccinated yet, [Anne Rimoin](#), PhD, MPH, professor of epidemiology at UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, tells *Health*.

RELATED: [Does Wearing 2 Masks Protect Against COVID-19 Better Than One? Here's What Experts Say](#)

"It will take time to widely distribute the vaccine and achieve herd immunity (and that's not guaranteed), so non-pharmaceutical interventions like mask wearing and social distancing will continue to be crucial to stopping the spread," explains Rimoin. If many Americans continue to be hesitant about getting the vaccine, there could be a lot of susceptible people, she adds. Remember, some people aren't able to get vaccinated, such as those with severe allergic reactions to vaccine ingredients. And some pregnant or breastfeeding women may choose not to receive the vaccine until more information is available about the safety of the vaccines in those groups.

Continuing to wear a [face mask](#) is also important because of the new COVID variants that have been identified. Because they're thought to be more infectious, they can spread more easily to more people if vaccinated people are able to transmit the virus and don't wear a mask, Rimoin warns.

There's another reason to keep masking up even after you've been vaccinated. "In our modern society, we don't discriminate by immune status, and the ethics of doing so would be a very slippery slope," [Michal Tal](#), PhD, an immunologist at Stanford University, tells *Health*. "It's already hard to get everyone to follow current masking regulations, and now if you have some people who are vaccinated (and likely, but not certainly, immune from developing COVID-19 symptoms) not needing to adhere to those same regulations, it will wreak additional havoc on what has

already been an extremely chaotic pandemic response."

RELATED: [Why Are the New Strains of COVID-19 More Contagious? Here's What We Know So Far](#)

The advice from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) is clear. According to the group's guidelines, "not enough information is currently available to say if or when CDC will stop recommending that people wear masks and avoid close contact with others to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19."

Per the CDC guidelines, we need to keep social distancing (by staying six feet away from other people), too. The CDC also recommends avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, and washing your hands often—even after you've had your COVID-19 shot.

RELATED: [Is the COVID-19 Vaccine Safe for Everyone? Here's Who Should \(and Shouldn't\) Get It, According to Experts](#)

So will we ever be able to ditch our masks? Hopefully, yes—although they might remain a significant part of life for some.

"I think that we have to continue to wear masks until everyone has had a chance to get vaccinated and we have gotten the virus under control," Tal says. "When community transmission is low and the majority of people are vaccinated, I think we'll safely be able to put our masks away."

However, nobody knows for sure what role masks will play in our future. "I've often wondered if one day we will move houses and discover an old box of masks from these days and dust it off, not having thought about it in years, or if we will start to utilize masks more and more to control the spread of other respiratory infections, such as on an especially bad flu year," Tal says.

"I suspect that moving forward, doctors and nurses may incorporate masks as a standard part of personal protective equipment for their interactions with patients, much as glove wearing became standard during the AIDS epidemic and then became standard protective gear," she adds. "I think that the vast majority of us, however, can look forward to mask-free days as soon as everyone has had a chance to get vaccinated and viral spread in the community is low."

The information in this story is accurate as of press time. However, as the situation surrounding COVID-19 continues to evolve, it's possible that some data have changed since publication. While Health is trying to keep our stories as up-to-date as possible, we also encourage readers to stay informed on news and recommendations for their own communities by using the [CDC](#), [WHO](#), and their local public health department as resources.

To get our top stories delivered to your inbox, sign up for the [Healthy Living](#) newsletter