

New recommendations on social distancing after vaccination are coming: Fauci

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New guidance on what social distancing measures are best for people

who are fully vaccinated is on the way, Dr. Anthony Fauci said Monday.

Right now, the advice from [health officials](#) is to keep wearing your mask, keep social distancing and keep away from gatherings after you receive both shots of [coronavirus](#) vaccine.

But during a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 91-year-old Esther Cohen asked Fauci when she and her friends—who all have received both vaccine shots—can safely resume their mah-jongg games, *CNN* reported.

In response, Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said there is no CDC guidance on what to do when groups of people who have received both vaccine doses want to get together.

"But I believe that's going to change," Fauci said. "We're talking about this at the level of the CDC."

Vaccinations began in the United States on Dec. 14. More than 9.5 million people have been fully vaccinated with two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to CDC data updated Monday.

The two authorized vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer prevent symptomatic infections in most, but not all, [cases](#). And it is still unclear whether they stop asymptomatic infection, *CNN* reported.

If you are asymptomatic, you would still test positive for COVID-19, and even if you are vaccinated, you could still spread the virus. That's why the guidance now is that even the vaccinated still need to wear masks. A person could be an asymptomatic carrier and have the virus in their nasal passageways, so when they are breathing or speaking or sneezing they could still pass the novel coronavirus on to others, health

experts have explained.

Fauci said that he and his daughter, who have both been fully vaccinated, still follow the standard social distancing and quarantine guidelines before seeing each other.

"I'm doubly vaccinated. My daughter is doubly vaccinated. The last time she tried to come home, she had to go quarantine for 14 days and get tested," he said. "It was a big, big deal to finally see my daughter in the same room. I think that's going to have to change."

"What's the reason to get vaccinated in the first place, if you don't want to get to normal?" he added.

British COVID variant spreading rapidly across U.S.

The highly contagious coronavirus variant that drove Britain into lockdown in December is now spreading quickly across the United States, a new study shows.

What has been dubbed the B.1.1.7 variant is doubling its prevalence every nine days in this country, according to a report posted on the preprint server MedRxiv on Sunday and not yet peer-reviewed or published in a journal. The findings, from a large collaboration of scientists, buttresses a forecast issued last month by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that showed the variant becoming dominant in this country by late March.

The researchers scrutinized genomic analyses of the virus samples from 10 states, including from 212 infections involving the variant, and concluded that the variant has been 35% to 45% more transmissible than other variants in the United States.

"It is here, it's got its hooks deep into this country, and it's on its way to very quickly becoming the dominant lineage," study co-author Michael Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona, told the *Washington Post*.

"Those models are very sensitive to assumptions about how many people the average infected person passes the virus to. If those assumptions are off by just a bit, or if we let our guard down and relax mitigation measures, I believe we could well see a dangerous upward surge of cases as B.1.1.7 comes to dominate the U.S. epidemic in March," Worobey added.

"Our study shows that the U.S. is on a similar trajectory as other countries, where B.1.1.7 rapidly became the dominant SARS-CoV-2 variant, requiring immediate and decisive action to minimize COVID-19 morbidity and mortality," the authors of the new report said.

In the study, Florida stands out as the state with the highest estimated prevalence of the variant. The new report estimated the doubling time of B.1.1.7 prevalence in positive test results at just over nine days.

Florida leads the nation in reported B.1.1.7 cases, with 201 as of Tuesday, followed by much more populous California with 150, according to the CDC. A total of 690 cases have been reported in 33 states, according to the CDC.

The new study only looked at data through the end of January, but the percentage of B.1.1.7 infections in Florida may have risen from a little less than 5 percent to approximately 10 percent in just the past week in Florida, study co-author Kristian Andersen, an immunologist at Scripps Research Institute, told the *Post*.

Mary Jo Trepka, an epidemiologist at Florida International University,

told the newspaper she is not surprised by the spread of the variant in Florida, because the state has not been strict about mask mandates or other restrictions, while at the same time it is a hub for international travel.

"The message is that we have to work harder to prevent transmission of all these cases of COVID," she said. "If we don't, we'll potentially see more variants. We need to get everybody vaccinated and we need to do a much better job at preventing transmission."

The variant first appeared in genomic surveys in the United Kingdom in September, but did not get tagged as a "variant of concern" until early December when its rapid spread stunned scientists and prompted lockdowns in southern England.

"What concerns me is the exponential growth in the early stages doesn't look very fast," Andrew Noymer, an epidemiologist at the University of California, Irvine, who was not part of the new study, told the *Post*. "It kind of putzes along—and then goes boom."

U.S. health officials say they are in a race against time to increase the number of Americans vaccinated as more contagious variants of the virus spread across America. By Tuesday, more than 42.4 million Americans had been vaccinated, while 59.3 million doses have been distributed. Just over 9.5 million people have had their second shot, according to the CDC.

Coronavirus cases drop across U.S.

Even as the U.K. variant makes a foothold in the United States, overall coronavirus case counts are steadily dropping among Americans, as the worst of the latest surge in the pandemic seems to be subsiding.

Some parts of the country, including the Upper Midwest, are experiencing bigger decreases in new cases than others. Four states in the region—Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa—have seen average daily cases fall by 80 percent or more, *The New York Times* reported.

There was yet another glimmer of hope last week, after Johnson & Johnson announced it had asked the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for emergency approval of what would be the first single-dose vaccine in the country. If approved, this latest vaccine would join the two-dose vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna that are already being administered to Americans.

As for coronavirus cases, the places with the steepest decreases tended to be small counties where the overall case count is relatively small, leading to wild swings in the data, the *Times* said. Using data on roughly 600 counties that had at least 100 daily cases at their recent peak shows that cases have fallen 60 percent, on average.

The current decline in infections remains most pronounced in the Midwest. In Hennepin County, home to Minneapolis, daily cases have fallen to roughly 200 from 1,200, the *Times* reported. Wayne County, home to Detroit, saw a similar drop, to 220 from 1,200. While trending downward now, the current number of new cases is still higher than anything many of these areas experienced during the first six months of the coronavirus crisis, the newspaper said.

For instance, Maine saw relatively low case counts until November, when cases began to rise before peaking in late January at nearly 12 times the level of the state's peak last year, the *Times* reported. Despite that, the current daily case count in Maine pales in comparison to states like Texas, whose rate is triple that of Maine when adjusted for population.

A global scourge

By Tuesday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 27.1 million while the death toll neared 465,000, according to a *Times* tally. On Tuesday, the top five states for coronavirus infections were: California with over 3.4 million cases; Texas with more than 2.5 million cases; Florida with nearly 1.8 million cases; New York with nearly 1.5 million cases; and Illinois with over 1.1 million cases.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

In India, the coronavirus case count was more than 10.8 million by Tuesday, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. Brazil had over 9.5 million cases and more than 231,500 deaths as of Tuesday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 106.5 million on Tuesday, with over 2.3 million deaths recorded, according to the Hopkins tally.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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