

Now vaccinated, older adults emerge from COVID hibernation

March 27 2021, by David Sharp



In this Monday, March 22, 2021 file photo, two older adults socially distanced, watch a spring training exhibition baseball game between the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Baltimore Orioles in Bradenton, Fla. Spring has arrived with sunshine and warmer temperatures, and many vaccinated seniors are emerging from COVID-19-imposed hibernation. (AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar, File)

Bill Griffin waited more than a year for this moment: Newly vaccinated, he embraced his 3-year-old granddaughter for the first time since the pandemic began.

"She came running right over. I picked her up and gave her a hug. It was amazing," the 70-year-old said after the reunion last weekend.

Spring has arrived with sunshine and warmer weather, and many [older adults](#) who have been vaccinated, like Griffin, are emerging from COVID-19-imposed hibernation.

From shopping in person or going to the gym to bigger milestones like visiting family, the people who were once most at risk from COVID-19 are beginning to move forward with getting their lives on track. Nearly 45% of Americans who are 65 and older are now fully vaccinated.

Visiting grandchildren is a top priority for many older adults. In Arizona, Gailen Krug has yet to hold her first grandchild, who was born a month into the pandemic in Minneapolis. Now fully vaccinated, Krug is making plans to travel for her granddaughter's first birthday in April.

"I can't wait," said Krug, whose only interactions with the girl have been over Zoom and FaceTime. "It's very strange to not have her in my life yet."

The excitement she feels, however, is tempered with sadness. Her daughter-in-law's mother, who she had been looking forward to sharing grandma duties with, died of COVID-19 just hours after the baby's birth. She contracted it at a nursing home.



A limited number of socially distanced fans watch a spring training exhibition baseball game between the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Detroit Tigers at LECOM Park in Bradenton, Fla., Friday, March 26, 2021. Spring has arrived, and many older adults who have been vaccinated are emerging from hibernation imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)

Isolated by the pandemic, older adults were hard hit by loneliness caused by restrictions intended to keep people safe. Many of them sat out summer reunions, canceled vacation plans and missed family holiday gatherings in November and December.

In states with older populations, like Maine, Arizona and Florida, [health officials](#) worried about the emotional and physical toll of loneliness, posing an additional health concern on top of the virus.

But that's changing, and more older people are reappearing in public after they were among the first group to get vaccinated.

Those who are fully vaccinated are ready to get out of Dodge without worrying they were endangering themselves amid a pandemic that has claimed more than 540,000 lives in the United States.

"Now there's an extra level of confidence. I am feeling good about moving forward," said Ken Hughes, a 79-year-old Florida resident who is flying with his wife for a pandemic-delayed annual trip to Arizona in April.

Plenty of older adults are eager to hop on a jet to travel. Others are looking forward to the simpler things like eating at a restaurant, going to a movie theater or playing bingo.



Baseball fans gather in the Bullpen Club at George M. Steinbrenner Field before a spring training exhibition baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Toronto Blue Jays in Tampa, Fla., Wednesday, March 24, 2021. Spring has arrived, and many older adults who have been vaccinated are emerging from hibernation imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.(AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)

Sally Adams, 74, was among several older people who showed up for "parking lot bingo" in Glendale, Arizona. She felt safe because she'd been vaccinated and because she was in her car at the first bingo event in more than year.

Once she fulfills the time to reach peak immunity, she plans to indulge in little things like eating out. Both her and her husband, who is also vaccinated, have only done takeout. Now, they feel like it will be OK to even eat indoors—as long as it's not crowded.

"We'll probably go in and take the farthest table from other people just to be on the safe side," she said.

Indeed, many older adults are taking a cautious approach, especially when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declined to ease recommendations for travel.

Frequent traveler Cindy Charest was so excited about the prospect of jetting away for the first time in more than a year that she posted an airplane emoji with a photo of her being vaccinated on social media.

But she's taking a wait-and-see attitude after the CDC recommended against nonessential air travel, for now.



Cindy Charest researches the Southwest with hopes of soon resuming her travels now that she has received the COVID-19 vaccination, Wednesday, march 24, 2021, in Westbrook, Maine. Spring has arrived, and many older adults who have been vaccinated are emerging from hibernation imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)



Cindy Charest tries on her sun hat while arranging her hiking gear at her home, Wednesday, March 17, 2021, in Westbrook, Maine. The avid traveler is looking forward to resuming her travels now that she and her husband have been vaccinated for COVID-19. Spring has arrived, and many older adults who have been vaccinated are emerging from hibernation imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

"I think I got prematurely excited about it," said Charest, 65, of Westbrook, Maine. But she's ready to jump when the time comes. She's watching for changing guidance.

Others are also cautious.

"We're still in the thick of it," said Claudette Greene, 68, of Portland,

Maine. "We've made a lot of progress but we're not done with this."

Kathy Bubar said she and her husband are completely vaccinated but are in no hurry to push things. The 73-year-old Portland resident is planning to wait until fall before planning any major travel. She hopes to go on a safari in December.

"My goal in all of this is to not be the last person to die from COVID. I'm willing to be patient and take as long as it takes," she said.

The Griffins were also cautious before they were reunited with their granddaughter.

Bill Griffin, of Waterboro, didn't dare have close contact with family members until after being vaccinated because he has [lung disease](#), heart disease, kidney disease and [high blood pressure](#), all factors that pushed him into a high-risk category for COVID-19.

"Everybody wants to live for the moment, but the moment could have been very deadly. We listened to the scientists," he said.

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