

You've had your vaccine, what can you safely do now?

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The U.S. COVID-19 vaccination program is proceeding apace, with

more than one-fifth of adult Americans having received at least one dose and eligibility opening up for everyone by May 1, under orders from President Joe Biden.

That means the fully vaccinated now have one pressing question: What can I do now that I haven't been able to do before?

In a new [HealthDay Now interview](#), Mercedes Carnethon, vice chair of preventive medicine at the Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine, in Chicago, has answers. She said it's important to follow interim guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for people who are fully vaccinated.

While mask and social distancing requirements do loosen up for those folks who are two weeks past their final COVID-19 vaccine shot, there still are precautions to follow to protect those around you.

"The primary concern right now is that while evidence is emerging to suggest that vaccinated individuals cannot transmit the virus, it's not confirmed yet," Carnethon said. "The studies have not yet shown to the level of evidence that we'd like to see that vaccinated individuals can't still contract, carry and thus transmit, which is why caution is being offered and the reason why these guidelines are still considered interim guidelines."

People who are fully vaccinated can now enjoy small indoor get-togethers mask-free with others who are fully vaccinated, Carnethon said.

"There are, of course, limitations to that. You don't want a house full of a thousand people, or a standard group of 20. But small groups can congregate at this time," Carnethon said.

You'll still need to wear a mask if you're visiting a home containing people who have [risk factors](#) for severe COVID-19, or if you're out shopping at a grocery or department store.

"I would certainly say my reading and interpretation of the guidelines state that masks should be worn in large areas where there are a number of people gathering," Carnethon said. "There are too many factors for you to be able to control."

Vaccinated folks don't have to wear a mask while enjoying [outdoor activities](#) with other inoculated people, she said.

"The feeling is that with the outdoor air and the increased circulation, if you are around other vaccinated individuals in [small groups](#), it may be safe to socialize outside without a mask," Carnethon said. "However, individuals with underlying conditions or who have [family members](#) in their household whose health may be a little more fragile should still exercise the utmost caution by maintaining mask-wearing."

The CDC guidelines are interim because "our knowledge is still evolving," Carnethon explained.

"We're building the ship while we're at sea. Right now, they do not know how long the vaccines are effective. There are studies ongoing to see how long one's antibody levels remain high following vaccination," she said.

"One of the challenges that we're facing are with these new variants and whether or not we have to tweak the formulas a little bit that are in our vaccines," she continued. "Until we know that, and we know how long immunity will be conferred from a vaccination, the doctors are really taking a wait-and-see approach to know whether this is going to be an annual shot like the flu shot or whether it will confer some immunity

longer than annual."

In the meantime, Carnethon urged caution even among those who've gotten the full vaccine regimen.

"We're just not in the clear. I think we all see hope on the horizon, opportunities to get back together with friends, with statements of hope that Fourth of July may look close to normal, but we're definitely not out of the woods," Carnethon said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [guidelines for the fully vaccinated](#).

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