

# CDC says many Americans can now go outside without a mask

April 27 2021, by Mike Stobbe

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Masked and unmasked pedestrians walk along the Las Vegas Strip, Tuesday, April 27, 2021, in Las Vegas. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. (AP Photo/John Locher)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers.

And those who are unvaccinated can go outside without masks in some situations, too.

The new guidance represents another carefully calibrated step on the road back to normal from the coronavirus outbreak that has killed over 570,000 people in U.S.

For most of the past year, the CDC had been advising Americans to wear masks outdoors if they are within 6 feet of one another.

"Today, I hope, is a day when we can take another step back to the normalcy of before," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said. "Over the past year, we have spent a lot of time telling Americans what you can't do. Today, I am going to tell you some of the things you can do, if you are fully vaccinated."

The change comes as more than half of U.S. adults—or about 140 million people—have received at least one dose of [vaccine](#), and more than a third have been fully vaccinated.

Walensky said the decision was driven by rising vaccination numbers; declines in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths; and research showing that less than 10% of documented instances of transmission of the virus happened outdoors.



People spend time as they take advantage of warm spring weather along Lake Michigan on Tuesday, April 27, 2021, at Montrose Beach in Chicago. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. (AP Photo/Shafkat Anowar)

Dr. Mike Saag, an infectious disease expert at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, welcomed the change.

"It's the return of freedom," Saag said. "It's the return of us being able to do normal activities again. We're not there yet, but we're on the exit ramp. And that's a beautiful thing."

Some experts portrayed the relaxed guidance as a reward and a motivator for more people to get vaccinated—a message President Joe Biden sounded, too.

"The bottom line is clear: If you're vaccinated, you can do more things, more safely, both outdoors as well as indoors," Biden said. "So for those who haven't gotten their vaccinations yet, especially if you're younger or thinking you don't need it, this is another great reason to go get vaccinated now."

The CDC, which has been cautious in its guidance during the crisis, essentially endorsed what many Americans have already been doing over the past several weeks.



In this Wednesday, March 3, 2021 file photo, people wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus walk through a shaft of light on a street in Philadelphia. On Tuesday, April 27, 2021, U.S. health officials say fully vaccinated Americans don't need to wear masks outdoors anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers, and those who are unvaccinated can go without a face covering outside in some cases, too. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

The CDC says that whether they are fully vaccinated or not, people do not have to wear masks outdoors when they walk, bike or run alone or with members of their household. They can also go maskless in small outdoor gatherings with fully vaccinated people.

But unvaccinated people—defined as those who have yet to receive both doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson formula—should wear masks at small outdoor gatherings that include other unvaccinated people, the CDC says. They also should keep their faces covered when dining at outdoor restaurants with friends from multiple households.

And everyone, fully vaccinated or not, should keep wearing masks at crowded outdoor events such as concerts or sporting events, the CDC says.

The agency continues to recommend masks at indoor public places, such as hair salons, restaurants, shopping centers, gyms, museums and movie theaters, saying that is still the safer course even for vaccinated people.



A woman wears a face mask as she rides a skateboard along a beach promenade Tuesday, April 27, 2021, in San Diego. U.S. health officials say fully vaccinated Americans don't need to wear masks outdoors anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. And unvaccinated people can drop face coverings in some cases, too. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull)

"Right now it's very hard to tease apart who is vaccinated," Walensky explained.

She said the CDC guidance should be a model for states in setting their mask-wearing requirements.

The advice to the unvaccinated applies to adults and children alike, according to the CDC. None of the COVID-19 vaccines in use in the

U.S. is authorized for children under 16.

"The biggest thing that it helps us is our mental health," said Tim Stephens, a 52-year-old software salesman in Birmingham, Alabama, who suffered a bout of COVID-19 and has since gotten vaccinated.

"To be able to feel like we're turning the corner and can confidently go out and experience life and do a lot of the things that we did before COVID became an acronym in our world. It's one more step in the process of moving beyond this."

In Oxford, Nebraska, population 800, hardly anyone wears a mask, and the school district dropped its mask mandate last month. Superintendent Bryce Jorgensen said maybe 10 of the 370 students are still covering their faces.



People gather with their dogs in Chicago's Montrose Dog Beach, Tuesday, April 27, 2021. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. (AP Photo/Shafkat Anowar)



Masked and unmasked pedestrians walk Tuesday, April 27, 2021, near the Capitol in Olympia, Wash. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)





Chet Ski, left and Richard Paul sunbath as others pass along Lake Michigan on Tuesday, April 27, 2021 in Montrose Beach, Chicago. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. (AP Photo/Shafkat Anowar)



Donna Anderson, left, walks with her friend Christine White, Tuesday, April 27, 2021, in Olympia, Wash. Both women said they are fully vaccinated and have felt comfortable recently in not wearing masks when they are outdoors. On Tuesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

"What goes on in other states is what goes on in other states," Jorgensen said. "You just can't compare Chicago to Oxford, Nebraska. Things are just different."

Dr. Babak Javid, a physician-scientist at the University of California, San Francisco, said the new CDC guidance is sensible.

"In the vast majority of outdoor scenarios, transmission risk is low," Javid said.

Javid has favored outdoor mask-wearing requirements because he believes they increase indoor mask-wearing, but he said Americans can understand the relative risks and make good decisions.

He added: "I'm looking forward to mask-free existence."

"The timing is right because we now have a fair amount of data about the scenarios where transmission occurs," said Mercedes Carnethon, a professor and vice chair of preventive medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

What's more, she said, "the additional freedoms may serve as a motivator" for people to get vaccinated.

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