

Cases down, but experts say COVID-19 pandemic isn't over

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With the peak of the Omicron surge in the rearview mirror, the number of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. is dropping. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says last week's seven-day moving average of

daily new cases decreased nearly 43% compared with the previous week. But Mayo Clinic COVID-19 experts caution that the number of new COVID-19 cases is still significant.

"It's very encouraging to see the rates come down from the Omicron surge. But to put it in perspective, we are still having rates that are among the highest that we had during our delta surge—and really second only to Omicron's peak in the pandemic so far. So we are far from out of the woods. COVID is still very much with us right now," says Dr. Melanie Swift, a Mayo Clinic internist and preventive medicine specialist.

As COVID-19 cases drop, some masking mandates across the country are ending and other restrictions are being loosened.

"As we start to see municipalities relax some of their masking requirements, individuals have to make their own decision about their own risk," says Dr. Swift.

She says people who wear a disposable surgical mask in public have a 65% lower risk of getting COVID-19. It improves to 85% if you're wearing an N95 mask.

"Masking becomes much more important when you're indoors and when you're in [close proximity](#) to other people who may not be wearing masks."

Despite the decreasing number of COVID-19 cases, Dr. Swift emphasizes the importance of being vaccinated for COVID-19.

"Vaccination has moved us to a very different place than we would have been without it. We still have had surges. We still have had record high hospitalizations. But without vaccination, this would have been so much

more devastating. In the hospital, the majority of patients are unvaccinated," she says.

Being vaccinated for COVID-19 doesn't mean you won't get infected, but the chances of being hospitalized or dying of COVID-19 are much lower. As new variants arise, booster vaccinations play an important part in staying safe.

"Vaccinated people have gotten infected, especially with Omicron. And what we are learning is that the booster dose taken recently is very important," says Dr. Swift. "We don't yet know how many boosters we'll need, or if we'll need that ongoing. But if you haven't had your initial vaccination, that's the No. 1 priority. And then if you have had your initial vaccination, getting that [booster dose](#) is also really important to preventing infection, even though your initial [vaccine](#) still gives you some protection from hospitalization."

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