

Crowded venues are opening again: Know your COVID risks

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Many folks have been waiting over two years for the chance to hear live

music and see sports in person again, but if you plan to attend events you still need to protect yourself against COVID, an expert says.

"We are doing much better and our viral numbers are improving rapidly and dramatically, so that's very encouraging," said Dr. James McDeavitt, executive vice president and dean of clinical affairs at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"However, we're still in a very high-prevalence environment. People need to continue to be cautious, particularly if they're in relatively [high-risk groups](#) or routinely exposed to people at high risk," he added in a Baylor news release.

You should still consider wearing a [mask](#) in a crowded indoor setting, and the best choice is an N95, KN95 or a surgical mask. If you cannot get these, wear a double-layer cloth mask, McDeavitt said.

It's also important to assess your risk based on your health and location.

If you are not vaccinated and boosted, get the vaccine and booster. If you plan to go to a large event with a group, ask members of the group if they are vaccinated and boosted and encourage others around you to get vaccinated, McDeavitt advised.

He noted that during the [Omicron](#) wave, unvaccinated people accounted for a disproportionate number of patients who became critically ill, while those who were vaccinated and boosted were largely protected against critical illness.

Assess the risk among people close to you: family, friends, colleagues and anyone else you come in contact with regularly. Maintain a higher degree of caution if they're at risk.

If you live with or have frequent contact with an elderly relative, someone who has a serious medical condition or someone with a weakened [immune system](#), you need to understand they're at high risk. Consider avoiding large events or wearing a mask to prevent potentially catching and spreading the virus to them, McDeavitt suggested.

You also need to be cautious if you work in an environment where you are routinely exposed to people at high risk, such as nursing homes, health care settings or retirement centers.

Before going to an event, check the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [website](#) to find the coronavirus case rate in your county. When it's below 100 cases per 100,000 population per seven days, you are much less likely to encounter an infected person—and the lower the rate, the lower your risk.

If you have COVID-19 symptoms, don't go to crowded places. You also need to know that if an event does not require COVID-19 testing, attendees do not need to get tested before or after the event unless they have symptoms.

"Learning to live with the virus doesn't mean we ignore it and pretend it's not there. It's taking [personal responsibility](#) for using the tools available to be as safe as possible while going about our lives," McDeavitt said. "We need to start opening up public events and let individuals make their own risk-benefit calculation of whether attendance is the right thing for them."

More information: For more on protecting yourself and others from COVID-19, see the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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