

Can you stop COVID-19 precautions once you get vaccinated?

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(HealthDay)—It will be tempting for folks to think they can resume a 'normal' life after they've received the two-dose course of the COVID-19 vaccine.

But infectious disease experts warn that you'll still need to wear a mask and practice [social distancing](#) even after getting either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or perhaps one of the other vaccines still in the testing pipeline.

That's because the [clinical trials](#) that tested these vaccines for safety and effectiveness focused on whether they could prevent you from getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19, experts say.

What isn't known is whether vaccinated folks could become unknowing 'Typhoid Mary' candidates—capable of becoming infected and spreading the coronavirus to others, even though they themselves are safe from serious illness.

"You could be infected and you could be

contagious even though you had the [vaccine](#)," said Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of infectious disease with the Vanderbilt Medical Center in Nashville. "We don't know that, but we don't know it's not true."

Another expert agreed.

"We can't guarantee you that with two doses of the vaccine you're not harboring the virus in an asymptomatic manner and could spread it to other people. It's going to be important to be cautious..." added Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar with the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

Vaccinated folks who wear a mask and practice social distancing will protect themselves from becoming asymptomatic carriers of the disease. Infection prevention also will keep others from becoming sick if the vaccinated have inadvertently become infected with [coronavirus](#).

"If you're hugging somebody and they're not vaccinated and they're in a vulnerable population, maybe they have diabetes or maybe they're over 60, you could infect them with the virus and they could become sick," Adalja said.

The vaccinated also will protect themselves from the small but real risk that they could develop a serious case of COVID-19 despite their inoculation, said Dr. Waleed Javaid, an associate professor of medicine and infectious diseases with the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

"The vaccine's effectiveness is at 95%. There's still that 5%," Javaid said.

States might start relaxing social distancing guidelines as vaccination spreads through [vulnerable groups](#) like seniors and people with medical problems, Adalja said.

"Once the [vulnerable populations](#) are vaccinated, people are going to be breathing a sigh of relief because that's what is driving hospitalizations and deaths," Adalja said. "You may see some of the guidance in states loosening up once that group of the population has been protected."

However, it will likely take until late summer or fall 2021 to produce the estimated 300 million doses needed to protect all of the vulnerable groups in the United States, said Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Patience will be paramount, Javaid said.

"The most important thing right now is this is a historic time, in terms of having a vaccine so quickly available that has great efficacy. We are at the cusp of halting this pandemic, if all of us get the vaccine," Javaid said.

Offit has his own personal goal for the end of the pandemic.

"How will I know personally that I now feel we have stopped the spread of this virus and I feel comfortable? It's when I can go to Eagles games, because I'm an Eagles season ticket holder, knowing I don't have to wear a mask because it's hard to boo through a mask," Offit said.

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has more information about [COVID-19 vaccines](#).

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