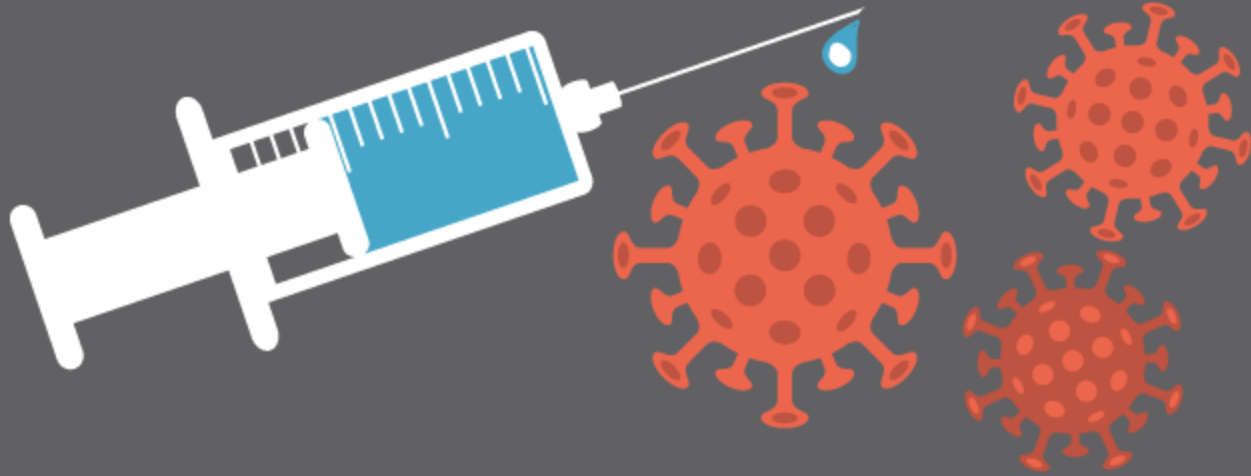


I've been vaccinated. Can I go back to normal now?



As more and more Pamlico County residents receive their second COVID-19 vaccination, some have asked: Can I stop wearing a mask? Can I hug people now? Can I visit family and friends? Can I travel without thinking about precautions?

The best way to set realistic expectations around what life will look like in 2021 is to think of it in four stages.

- Stage 0 is what you can safely do once you have been vaccinated but others have not.
- Stage 1 is what you can safely do once you and your close friends or family are vaccinated.
- Stage 2 is what you can safely do once Pamlico County and North Carolina has reached herd immunity, where enough people are protected against infection that the virus can't easily spark new outbreaks.
- Stage 3 is what you can do once herd immunity is reached around the world. (There's a good chance we won't reach stage 3 in 2021.)

Stage 0. You have been vaccinated, but some of your family and friends have not.

- You should continue to follow the 3 Ws: wear a mask, wash your hands frequently, and wait at least six feet away from other people.
- You should continue to stay at home as much as possible.
- While the vaccination will likely protect you from becoming ill with COVID-19 (for probably a year, but we don't know for sure yet), you may still be able to carry the virus in your nose and respiratory system and transmit to other people

Stage 1. You and your close family and friends have all been vaccinated.

- Continue to follow the 3 Ws, as you all may still be able to carry the virus and transmit it to others.

- Give the vaccination time to work: each person in your group should allow one to two weeks after the second shot for the body to develop antibodies. But remember, the protective response to the vaccine may vary between individuals.
- If your entire group of family / friends have all gotten the full vaccine regimen and at least a week has passed since the second shot for every person, it probably is okay for you to get together with them in a closed setting, where you're not interacting with the public. So hang out together at home or a vacation rental, but no bar-hopping! And don't forget the 3 Ws when you are out in public.
- The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines showed ~95 percent efficacy at preventing symptomatic disease in trials after two doses. But they're not 100 percent. There is a small possibility that a vaccinated person could still develop symptoms of COVID. Although the vaccines are very good at preventing the severe symptoms that land people in the hospital, experts can't rule out the possibility that you'll develop milder symptoms, which could conceivably turn chronic or "long-haul." There's also a chance that one of your vaccinated friends might transmit the virus to you. It will require more time and study to know how effective the vaccine is at not only preventing or reducing infection, but also preventing transmission.

Stage 2. The places you live in and visit have achieved herd immunity.

- In public settings, we all should continue with masking and social distancing until **75 to 85 percent of the population is vaccinated**, according to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. He estimates that around that stage — which could come in mid-fall — the US will reach herd immunity. (This is just an estimate, though, and it's liable to change depending on Covid-19 variants, vaccine uptake rates, and other factors.)
- We are likely to see regions within the US passing the immunity threshold at different times. As North Carolina announces that it is past the threshold, the health department is likely to ease requirements gradually. You will want to know the level of herd immunity achieved for any city, county or state you want to visit.
- Given that there's a lot of travel between jurisdictions, we will all probably need to continue to wear masks until the whole country reaches herd immunity.

Stage 3. Herd immunity is reached internationally.

- There's a good chance we won't reach this stage until 2022 or later, because access to vaccines is far from equal around the world.
- Scientists are still learning how well the vaccine prevents infection and transmission, and it will be at least spring or summer before they have a good understanding of the effects of current vaccination programs around the world.
- If it turns out that the vaccines prevent infection and transmission almost as well as they prevent symptomatic disease, we may see some countries opening their borders to tourists who provide proof of vaccination, in an effort to get the tourism sector and the broader economy going again.

For now, remember that keeping up with the measures we know curb the spread of the virus — like masking and social distancing — is the best way to ensure we can all get back to normal faster. Yes,

we are all sick of them. But better to be sick of them, than sick with COVID!! And the more we stick to them over the next few months, the sooner we can abandon them for good.

This newsletter is adapted from this article:

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22219362/end-of-covid-19-pandemic-social-distancing-masking>

COVID-19 COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

The COVID-19 Community Task Force (CCTF) is a volunteer organization established to engage the community in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and to support and augment the County's efforts. The information shared by the CCTF is not an official communication from Pamlico County, its Health Department or the Pamlico County COVID19 Task Force.