

LATEST UPDATE – AUGUST 11, 2021

The Delta variant – what you need to know

After a sharp drop in COVID infections in the first half of the year, many states have seen numbers inching up recently as the Delta variant – a highly infectious, contagious, and more severe strain – started to quickly spread, particularly among a younger demographic as states eased restrictions.

This strain is also causing “breakthrough” cases in fully-vaccinated persons. A recent outbreak in Provincetown, MA made headlines after hundreds were infected, including many fully-vaccinated persons (74%). Very few of those infected in this outbreak were hospitalized, and none died, proving that the vaccines work as expected to prevent severe illness and death from COVID-19.

In total, out of approximately 164 million people vaccinated nationwide, there have been 125,682 breakthrough cases since January. This sounds like a lot, but it breaks down to 0.08%. Thinking about it in another way, 99.92% of vaccinated people have **not** had a breakthrough infection – pretty solid odds! **On the contrary, almost 99% of hospitalized patients infected with COVID-19 are UNVACCINATED.**

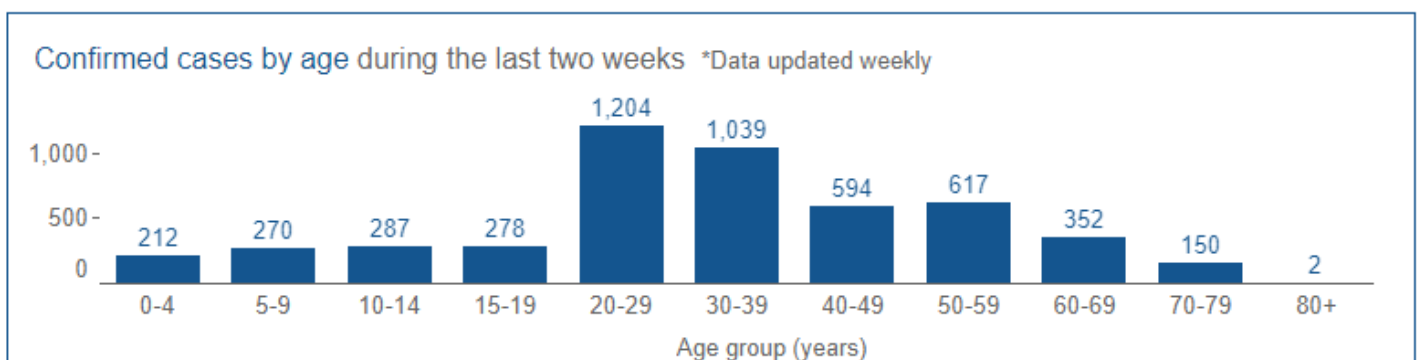
How did we end up with Delta?

It is important to understand the science behind mutations and vaccination. Viruses aren't living things - they need a host (you) to survive. Once a virus enters your body, it reproduces and spreads. The more a virus circulates in a population of people, the more it can change and mutate. Every time the virus jumps to a new person, its chance of mutation increases. However, if the virus keeps running into vaccinated people, it hits a wall and can't keep spreading. Decreasing the number of infections through vaccination is the best way to stop community spread and prevent new variants from developing.

How bad is it in our community?

On August 2, 2021, there were 883 new, confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported in Massachusetts. There are currently 226 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, 51 in ICU and 16 who are intubated. What is most concerning about this variant is the population most impacted – the younger, 20-40 age group.

As of July 6, 78% of the eligible population in MA have had at least one dose of the vaccine. 70% are fully vaccinated. While Massachusetts is faring better than other states, updated data from the CDC now shows nine Massachusetts counties, including Worcester, at either substantial or high risk. Last week, the CDC said that even fully vaccinated individuals in such areas should wear masks when in public indoor settings.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- The WHA is not currently making any changes to existing COVID-related protocols, but will be watching the numbers closely and responding quickly to changes in public health guidance.
- **Unvaccinated persons *must* continue to mask on WHA property when outside of their unit.** Vaccinated individuals are encouraged to mask in public spaces, especially when in close contact with others from outside of your household. Sanitize, keep your hands away from your face, and use caution around those at high-risk.
- **GET VACCINATED! Now is the time.** In most hospitals, over 99% of COVID patients in ICU are unvaccinated. Many beg for the vaccine as they lay dying in hospital beds without their loved ones. For them, it's too late. For you, it's not. The Delta variant is as contagious as chicken pox, spreading quickly and hitting even young and healthy people hard, including children. Talk to your doctor and get reliable, professional, educated advice.
- **Worried about side effects?** The vaccine is not live and leaves the body within 72 hours. The antibodies created by your own immune system is what sticks around. Serious side effects from the vaccine are extremely rare and the vast majority occur within 6-8 weeks of receiving the shot. In contrast, the long term effects of COVID can be devastating, including permanent lung damage, permanent loss of taste or smell, and cognitive issues, like brain fog and memory loss. Millions of people around the globe have been vaccinated to date without issue. *What are you still waiting for?*

FROM THE FRONTLINES

“As Mindy Greene spent another day in the COVID intensive care unit, listening to the whirring machines that now breathed for her 42-year-old husband, Russ, she opened her phone and tapped out a message.

“We did not get the vaccine,” she wrote on Facebook. “I read all kinds of things about the vaccine and it scared me. So I made the decision and prayed about it and got the impression that we would be ok.”

They were not.

Her husband, the father to their four children, was now hovering between life and death, tentacles of tubes spilling from his body. The patient in the room next to her husband's had died hours earlier. That day, July 13, Greene decided to add her voice to an unlikely group of people speaking out in the polarized national debate over vaccination: the remorseful.

“If I had the information I have today we would have gotten vaccinated,” Greene wrote. Come what may, she hit send. “I have such incredible guilt,” Greene said one morning as she sat in the fourth-floor lobby outside the ICU at Utah Valley Hospital in Provo, which looks out to the mountains where her family once went hiking and four-wheeling. “I blame myself still. Every day.”

RESOURCES

- **Need a COVID vaccine?** Click here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccination-locations>.
- **Need a COVID test?** Click here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/find-a-covid-19-test>.
- **Other resources:** Text WHACOVID to 67076 for alerts or visit: <http://www.worcesterha.org/covid19.html>.