

Alliance Vaccination Update, July/August 2021

Mask Guidance

Indoor settings with unmasked and unvaccinated people present a real risk for spreading COVID. The Centers for Disease Control recently issued revised [guidance](#) for fully vaccinated people to continue to mask indoors if they are in an area of substantial or high transmission. Garfield County is the only area considered low risk in Washington state. All other counties are considered moderate, substantial, or high risk for transmission. Washington State Department of Health issued an [order](#) recommending masks for unvaccinated and for vaccinated people when they are in public places or in a place that is accessible to people from outside their household. The health officers of Clallum, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Pierce, San Juan, and Snohomish counties issued a joint [statement](#) recommending all residents wear masks in indoor public spaces where the vaccination status of others is unknown.

Reopening Requirements

Businesses or organizations engaging with customers or patrons in indoor public spaces are required to post signage regarding the mask policy for that establishment. This signage must be posted in a prominent location at each entry. Businesses may continue to implement capacity and physical distancing restrictions and to request or require employees and customers to wear masks, but must make reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities.

Fully vaccinated employees do not have to wear a mask or physically distance at work unless their employer requires it. Employers are required to ensure unvaccinated and non-fully vaccinated employees wear a mask while working indoors, and must be able to show the process used to verify full vaccination status per the [guidelines](#) of Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. However, employers do not need to keep an actual copy of employees' vaccination records.

Posters are available from [Washington Department of Health](#) and [King County](#). A complete list of reopening guidance from Washington state is available [here](#). Employers and business owners can sign up for the state's weekly Economic Resiliency Team business and worker newsletter [here](#).

Resources for Small and Mid-Size Employers

Businesses, non-profits, and organizations with fewer than 500 employees can claim [refundable tax credits](#) that reimburse them for the cost of providing paid sick and family leave to their employees due to COVID-19, including leave taken by employees to receive or recover from COVID-19 vaccinations. The Washington State Department of Commerce's [Small Business Flex Fund](#) offers loans of up to \$150,000 for businesses with fewer than 50 employees. Small businesses in unincorporated King County with 30 or fewer employees can apply for grants of up to \$25,000 through the [Small Business Assistance Program](#), to help them recover from the effects of COVID-19.

Culturally and linguistically relevant help is [available](#) in multiple languages for small businesses and nonprofits looking to find and apply for resources, access translation assistance, plan for recovery and safe re-opening, and more from the Washington State Department of Commerce. Additional COVID-19 resources are available from:

Washington State Department of Health

- [Frequently Asked Questions on Reopening](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions on Masks and Face Coverings](#)

Washington State Labor and Industries

- [Requirements and Guidance for Preventing COVID-19](#)
- [Common Questions Regarding Worker Face Covering and Mask Requirements](#)

Public Health—Seattle and King County

- Re-opening Flyer ([English](#) and [Other Languages](#) available in; Amharic, Arabic, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Korean, Marshallese, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese)
- Frequently Asked Questions ([English](#) and [Other Languages](#), available in; Amharic, Arabic, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Dari, English, Farsi, Hindi, Hmong, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese).

COVID-19 Vaccine Breakthrough Cases

King County and Washington state have been monitoring incidences of vaccine breakthrough cases. Vaccine “breakthrough” occurs when a fully vaccinated person gets sick with the disease for which they’ve been vaccinated. In the case of the

COVID-19 vaccine, a [“breakthrough case”](#) means someone tests positive for COVID-19 after they are fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 breakthrough cases are rare. Cases have been reported in only a small percentage of fully vaccinated individuals both in Washington and across the United States – in large part because the COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective. However, as more and more people are vaccinated, we expect to see the number of these “breakthrough” cases rise because no vaccine can provide 100% protection. It’s important to note that the vast majority of the individuals experiencing a vaccine breakthrough have mild or no symptoms.

Breakthrough cases also depend on how much COVID-19 is spreading in the community—the more the disease is present, the higher the risk of COVID-19 for everyone, even though vaccinated people are at a much lower risk of getting sick than unvaccinated people are. Studies have also shown that fully vaccinated people are less likely to spread the virus to others if they do become infected. Vaccine breakthrough can happen when:

- **A person’s immunity is suppressed.** After getting vaccinated, medical experts advise people with suppressed immune systems to continue wearing a good-quality and well-fitting mask, keep physically distanced from unvaccinated people, and avoid crowded indoor spaces.
- **Variants are spreading.** Despite data showing COVID-19 vaccines offer very good protection against most variants of the virus spreading in the U.S. right now, certain variants may cause some of these vaccine breakthrough cases.
- **A person gets infected just before or just after vaccination.** It takes two weeks for the body to build full protection after the final vaccination in their series.

Delta Variant

The highly transmissible Delta variant’s share of infections has been steadily increasing over the past several months. It’s not unexpected to see COVID-19 continue to spread among unvaccinated people as activities resume and more contagious variants circulate. Vaccination remains our best tool to ensure protection—the available vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson) are highly effective. Once fully vaccinated, people are protected from severe disease and death, including from the Delta variant.

Additionally, the CDC and FDA released [a joint statement](#) on vaccine boosters, which have been frequently discussed in relation to the effectiveness in protection against variants of concern, including Delta. The CDC and FDA have stated that a booster shot is not necessary at this time for those who have been fully vaccinated, and a science-based, rigorous process is currently underway to assess whether or when boosters may be necessary.