

Congressional Coronavirus Disease Update July 27, 2021, CDC change to Mask Wear Recommendations in Interior Spaces



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The Attending Physician

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SUBJ: Congressional Coronavirus Disease Update; Centers for Disease Control Mask Wear Recommendations for Interior Spaces

Today, the Centers for Disease Control issued guidance to all individuals, both vaccinated and unvaccinated alike, to wear a mask in indoor spaces to further reduce spread of Delta agent coronavirus in areas of the USA characterized by elevated risk of disease transmission. This indoor mask requirement, for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, has already been enacted by local governments in selected regions of the United States.

For the Congress, representing a collection of individuals traveling weekly from various risk areas (both high and low rates of disease transmission), all individuals should wear a well-fitted, medical-grade filtration mask (for example an ear loop surgical mask or a KN95 mask) when they are in an interior space. This CDC recommended measure further reduces risk of acquiring infection, and potential risk of transmitting disease to an individual's vulnerable household members (children under age 12, immunocompromised family members, etc.). For all House Office Buildings, the Hall of the House, and House Committee Meetings, wearing of a well-fitted, medical grade, filtration face mask is required when an individual is in an interior space and other individuals are present. To be clear, for meetings in an enclosed US House of Representatives controlled space, masks are REQUIRED. Masks will be provided by the meeting sponsor to individuals arriving without masks. Members and staff will be required to always wear masks in the Hall of the House except while Members are under recognition. Members and staff will not be permitted to enter the Hall of the House without wearing a mask. Masks will be available at the entry points for any Member who needs one. Failure to wear a mask in the Hall of the House is subject to fines imposed for violation as contained in the previous House rule. Masks are NOT required in indoor spaces when an individual is alone. Limited exceptions are also permissible. For example, if addressing the Chair in a House committee room during an event or as part of recognition by a Presiding Officer, removal of the mask to facilitate recognition is an option, followed by immediate replacement of the mask following the address.

The Delta variant SARS CoV2 coronavirus has become the dominant coronavirus in the United States and continues to challenge aspects of disease control, public health, and the urgency to complete vaccination for unvaccinated individuals. This viral variant is much more contagious and accounts for most coronavirus transmission now in the United States. The emergence of the Delta variant and the threat it poses has led to a re-characterization of the CDC efforts to contain coronavirus spread among the population by focusing not only on the unvaccinated individuals but on the ongoing support of the vaccinated individuals in areas of high disease transmission.

In the past two weeks, USA coronavirus cases have significantly increased, now approaching 100,000 cases per day. The Delta variant virus has been detected in Washington, DC and in the Capitol buildings. It represents a dire health risk to unvaccinated individuals and is not without some risk to the vaccinated individuals or their unvaccinated household contacts. It is now endangering many regions of the United

States where vaccination rates are low. The coronavirus vaccines are highly effective and extremely safe. For those individuals reliant upon recovery from natural infection, the Delta variant is a severe threat and recovery from previous infection provides a little or no protection against the coronavirus variants. I urge unvaccinated individuals to come for vaccination at any time. Although “booster” shots for those previously vaccinated are under FDA review, there is no individual yet recommended for an additional vaccine dose.

Despite the excellent protective value of the coronavirus vaccine in preventing hospitalization and death, there is still a possibility a fully-vaccinated individual could acquire infection in their nose and throat, mild symptoms, or the ability to transmit the coronavirus infection to others. Initial studies suggested this was a small percentage of vaccinated individuals, but the precise risk is subject to ongoing analysis and may be very significant. (Some new studies cited in the CDC media event today suggest that the risk of acquiring infection is similar among vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals for the Delta variant given a high exposure. Although the vaccinated person might not become sick, the amount of virus in their nose may be as high as an unvaccinated person and may pose a risk of disease spread to others). Several vaccinated Congressional staff members and Members of Congress have acquired infection in this circumstance. All these recent individuals who acquired the “breakthrough” infection had no or minimal symptoms. There were no severe cases, attesting to the protective value of the vaccination.

There are also advantages to avoid acquiring the coronavirus infection, even if fully vaccinated, regarding development of the longer manifestations of the COVID illness (“long COVID”). Medical-grade filtration type mask wear further enhances the excellent protection that individuals gain from vaccination. The Congressional community has done very well in the support of the vaccination effort and has attained a very high degree of complete vaccination. Recently enhanced participation in rt-PCR testing of the Congressional community has demonstrated few are positive for virus. The Centers for Disease Control now recommends that all individuals wear a mask indoors when out of the home and in the company of other individuals. This indoor mask recommendation has already been enacted by local governments in many regions of the United States.

The Centers for Disease Control and the Office of Attending Physician are closely monitoring the local coronavirus cases. I remind all individuals to also continue to practice hand washing, avoid the workplace if they are ill, and continue to participate in their daily symptom inventory check prior to coming to work. Any respiratory symptoms should be further evaluated prior to coming to work. The CVC Coronavirus Test Center remains available and open in HVC 200 from 08:30 AM to 3 PM each day for walk-in, same-day-result rt-PCR based coronavirus testing for any concerned individuals. The Office of Attending Physician remains available to provide the Pfizer BioNTEC coronavirus vaccination in our Rayburn Health Unit Monday through Friday from 08:30 AM-4:30 PM

CONTACT US

For medical concerns (COVID or non-COVID related) contact the OAP at the numbers below. A physician is available to discuss your concern and provide guidance for further evaluation as needed.

- 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM weekdays: Call the OAP Main Office at 202-225-5421.
- All other times: Contact the Capitol Operator at 202-224-2145 and ask for the On-Call Physician.

Further information is available at: <https://attendingphysician.house.gov/>

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