

New CDC guidelines say vaccinated Americans can now ditch the masks, with a few exceptions: Live COVID-19 updates

Jorge L. Ortiz and John Bacon, USA TODAY Published 2:00 a.m. MT May 13, 2021 | Updated 1:35 p.m. MT May 14, 2021

Fully vaccinated Americans can discard masks and the need for social distancing outdoors and in most indoors settings, the CDC said Thursday (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>) in a dramatic announcement after months of mostly cautious measures.

The new guidelines announced by Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, represent a major step toward a return to normalcy for a nation battered and at times divided by a pandemic that has lasted more than a year.

"Anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities, large or small, without wearing a mask or physical distancing," Walensky said. "If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing the things that you had stopped doing because of the pandemic."

A person is considered fully vaccinated against the coronavirus two weeks after getting the second Pfizer or Moderna shot or the same length of time after receiving the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Answers to your questions: CDC lifts indoor mask guidelines for fully vaccinated people. What does it actually mean? ([/story/news/health/2021/05/13/cdc-mask-guidelines-im-vaccinated-what-can-do-indoor-and-outdoor/5078193001/](https://story/news/health/2021/05/13/cdc-mask-guidelines-im-vaccinated-what-can-do-indoor-and-outdoor/5078193001/))

The new guidance still calls for wearing masks in crowded indoor settings such as buses, planes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters but could ease restrictions for reopening workplaces and schools. In addition, the agency will no longer recommend that fully vaccinated people wear masks outdoors (<https://preview.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/04/30/cdc-covid-mask-guidelines-vaccination-outdoor-affect-people-of-color/4886137001/>) in crowds, possibly allowing for bigger capacities at sporting events.

"Today is a great day for America in our long battle with the coronavirus," President Joe Biden said in the Rose Garden after the CDC's announcement. "It think it's a great milestone."

Biden was meeting with GOP senators in the Oval Office when the CDC issued the new guidance and told his guests they could ditch their masks, according to Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo.

"The president said let's just take them off, right here, in the meeting," Blunt told reporters.

Masks mandates got politicized under former President Donald Trump, who usually eschewed face coverings and mocked those who had them, and they became a source of discord in parts of the country.

The new recommendations from the CDC could also serve as an incentive for the tens of millions of eligible Americans who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 to get their shots. Though more than 46% of the U.S. population of 330 million has received at least one vaccine dose, polls have shown about 25% don't intend to get inoculated.

Coronavirus cases in the U.S. are at their lowest rate since September and deaths are at their lowest point since April 2020, averaging about 600 a day, but some experts still worry that the emergence of variants could disrupt that momentum and create another surge, especially as the virus continues to

rage in other parts of the world.

Biden's administration had been under pressure to loosen pandemic restrictions as more Americans got vaccinated and infections diminished across most of the country.

Dr. Jay Wolfson, a public health expert at the University of South Florida, said the CDC had lost a great "a great deal of credibility" in the public's perception in part because its cautious guidance often lagged behind the "pragmatic realities" of the pandemic.

Contributing: Joel Shannon, Maureen Groppe

Vaccine equity: [Vaccine equity remains elusive as vaccination rates for people of color still lag \(/story/news/health/2021/05/07/vaccine-equity-racial-divide-vaccination-rates-continues-us/4870523001/\)](/story/news/health/2021/05/07/vaccine-equity-racial-divide-vaccination-rates-continues-us/4870523001/)

Also in the news:

► Many U.S. Latinos who remain unvaccinated want a shot but are concerned about losing work hours, having to pay for the vaccine or facing immigration issues, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll that found 47% of Hispanic adults have received at least one dose. That's below 60% for white adults and 51% for Blacks.

► New York Yankees shortstop Gleyber Torres tested positive for the coronavirus for a second time in less than a year. The Yankees have confirmed eight positive tests this week, all among personnel who have been fully vaccinated, but Torres is the first player.

► Prince Harry called out comedian Joe Rogan for suggesting on "The Joe Rogan Experience" podcast that young, healthy adults need not get vaccinated. "You've got to be careful about what comes out of your mouth," the British prince said on the "Armchair Expert" podcast that was released Thursday

► India reported more than 4,000 coronavirus deaths for the second day in a row amid concerns that many more rural deaths are going unreported.

► Caesars Entertainment [announced \(http://caesars.mediaroom.com/2021-05-12-Caesars-Entertainment>Returns-to-Full-Capacity-Gaming-Floors-at-all-Las-Vegas-Resorts\)](http://caesars.mediaroom.com/2021-05-12-Caesars-Entertainment>Returns-to-Full-Capacity-Gaming-Floors-at-all-Las-Vegas-Resorts) that its nine casinos have been cleared for 100% capacity in Las Vegas amid easing of coronavirus restrictions.

📊 **Today's numbers:** The U.S. has more than 32.8 million confirmed coronavirus cases and 584,000 deaths, [according to Johns Hopkins University data. \(https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html\)](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html) The global totals: 160.7 million cases and 3.33 million deaths. More than 339 million vaccine doses have been distributed in the U.S. and more than 266.5 million have been administered, [according to the CDC. \(https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations\)](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations) Nearly 119 million Americans have been fully vaccinated – 35.8% of the population.

📖 **What we're reading:** How effective are COVID-19 vaccines in the real world? Two studies offer 'stunning' results. [\(/story/news/nation/2021/05/12/covid-19-vaccine-study-effectiveness-includes-central-texas/5054289001/\)](/story/news/nation/2021/05/12/covid-19-vaccine-study-effectiveness-includes-central-texas/5054289001/) one doctor says.

Keep refreshing this page for the latest updates. Want more? [Sign up for our Coronavirus Watch newsletter \(https://profile.usatoday.com/newsletters/coronavirus-watch/\)](https://profile.usatoday.com/newsletters/coronavirus-watch/) for updates to your inbox and [join our Facebook group. \(https://www.facebook.com/groups/coronaviruswatchusatoday\)](https://www.facebook.com/groups/coronaviruswatchusatoday)

(Q)Florida Gov. DeSantis belittles cruise line amid dispute over restrictions

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis dismissed the world's third-largest cruise line, Miami-based Norwegian, as "not one of the bigger ones" in their ongoing dispute over requirements for cruises to set sail from state waters amid the pandemic.

The federal government is about to let cruise lines operate again, but only if nearly all passengers and crew are vaccinated against the coronavirus. DeSantis signed a bill banning businesses from requiring proof of vaccination, prompting Norwegian to say it might move trips from Florida -- where it has departure ports in Miami, Port Canaveral and Tampa -- to other states or the Caribbean.

DeSantis said that if any of the smaller cruise lines want to leave Florida, "that niche will get filled."

(Q)Prom night will happen for some, but with changes

Proms, essentially outlawed a year ago, are coming back in some school districts but with big changes. Some require a negative coronavirus test while others encourage vaccination. Most are requiring masks and putting strict restrictions on dancing or who can attend. In Florida, Sarasota County schools are banning dancing and limiting the event to seniors. At Elmbrook Schools outside of Milwaukee, prom-goers need a negative COVID-19 test and are encouraged to stick with their friends "to prevent any outbreak from having a dramatic impact on our ability to continue operations." An outdoor prom in Exeter, New Hampshire, on June 4 will rotate students on and off the dance floor – no touching allowed.

"The last thing we want is to spread COVID," said Liz Morse, Exeter High School senior class adviser. "Everyone is making concessions, and people are being pretty gracious about it."

()Pandemic shook public confidence in health system

The U.S. public health system was thrust into the limelight by the coronavirus pandemic, and a survey published Thursday found many Americans aren't happy with its performance (</story/news/health/2021/05/13/cdc-fda-american-opinion-public-health-system-suffers-amid-covid/5054439001/>). According to the survey, conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in February and March, ratings of nation's public health system declined from 43% in 2009 to 34% in 2021. Positive ratings for the CDC fell overall from 59% in 2009 to 54% in 2021.

"How the public sees public health is incredibly important," said Dr. Robert Blendon, co-director of the survey at Harvard. "When it comes to trust with health information, which is the heart of what public health is about, they're much more likely to trust clinical physicians and nurses than public health institutions and agencies."

– *Adrianna Rodriguez*

()\$50 monthly broadband bill discount has kicked in for many

You may be eligible for a \$50 monthly coronavirus pandemic discount (</story/tech/2021/05/12/fcc-internet-subsidy-broadband-discount-covid-relief/5045054001/>) on your home broadband bill starting this week. The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program was included as part of the roughly \$900 billion COVID-19 relief package passed by Congress in December 2020 and signed by President Donald Trump. It set aside \$3.2 billion for the Federal Communications Commission to cover the program. Among those eligible are households with income at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines.

"We all know that Internet access is essential for modern life," FCC Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said. "This pandemic has made it abundantly clear that broadband is no longer nice to have, it's need-to-have, for everyone, everywhere."

– *Mike Snider*

()Vaccine manufacturing capacity key to halting COVID spread, report says

High-income countries with access to manufacturing vaccines should commit to providing low-income countries at least 1 billion vaccine doses no later than fall 2021, according to a new report delivered to the World Health Organization. (https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/COVID-19-Make-it-the-Last-Pandemic_final.pdf) The report, intended to address missteps over the past year leading to more than 3 million deaths and even more lives changed, also focused on what countries in WHO can immediately do to stop the pandemic.

"The significant inequity in vaccine access must be addressed immediately, as it is not only unjust but also threatens the effectiveness of global efforts to control the pandemic," the report said.

The report, released with another in advance of this month's meeting of the WHO's governing assembly, also said that world governments must act swiftly and preemptively with the next pandemic to avoid global catastrophe.

()CDC reports more cases of blood clots linked to J&J COVID-19 vaccine

Thirteen more cases of an unusual blood clotting disorder have been identified among people who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine (</story/news/health/2021/05/12/j-j-covid-19-vaccine-cdc-additional-cases-blood-clots/5063485001/>), but no one else has died and no new cases have been seen among people vaccinated after the government's 11-day pause in J&J shots.

The CDC said Wednesday that 28 people have now been identified with a disorder being called Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS). To qualify for the diagnosis, someone must have a blood clot, known as a thrombosis, in an uncommon location, such as the brain, as well as low levels of platelets in their blood, a condition known as thrombocytopenia.

The combination is extremely rare. The fact that it occurred in so many people within about two weeks of vaccination "suggests a plausible causal association," Dr. Tom Shimabukuro, deputy director of the CDC's Immunization Safety Office, told an agency advisory committee Wednesday.

– *Karen Weintraub*

Contributing: The Associated Press.

Read or Share this story: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/05/13/covid-vaccine-cdc-variant-fda-clots-world-health-organization/5066504001/>