

# *News from the Wyoming Department of Health*

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## **COVID-19 Status Changing in Wyoming Due to Delta Variant**

Wyoming's fight against COVID-19 appears to be entering a new, concerning phase due to the Delta variant, according to the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH).

Dr. Alexia Harrist, state health officer and state epidemiologist with WDH, said the Delta variant is dominant in Wyoming right now, with most new cases in the state likely linked to the variant. "After months of relatively stable case numbers we have recently seen a sharp increase in most areas of the state," she said.

"We are deeply concerned. The Delta variant has really changed the COVID fight we have on our hands. Unfortunately, Wyoming's low vaccination rate makes our state more vulnerable to this highly contagious variant," Harrist said.

Harrist noted that while the Delta variant is rapidly changing Wyoming's COVID-19 situation, the authorized vaccines continue to offer excellent protection from infection, including against the Delta variant.

A WDH review of more than 5,000 lab-confirmed and probable cases identified among Wyoming residents age 16 and older between May 1 and July 28 shows roughly 95 percent of the individuals do not report being fully vaccinated against COVID-19. During the same period, of the nearly 300 persons infected by COVID-19 who were hospitalized at the time they were interviewed by public health representatives, just under 94 percent did not report being fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

"However, no vaccine can prevent all infections and that's why we see a small percentage of what we call 'breakthrough' cases," Harrist said. "The overwhelming majority of 'breakthrough' cases that are identified do not involve serious illness. In other words, vaccines certainly help keep you from getting COVID-19 in the first place, but if you do get it you are far less likely to get severely ill.

"The Delta variant must be taken seriously because it spreads much more easily between people than the COVID-19 we've become familiar with," Harrist said. "There are also concerns from experts that as the Delta variant spreads the number of breakthrough cases will increase."

“Because the Delta variant is essentially like COVID-19 upping its game against us, we have to fight back a little harder for now,” Harrist said.

“We’ve been recommending that unvaccinated people wears masks in indoor public settings. National experts now recommend the same for vaccinated residents in areas with high COVID-19 rates and we agree,” Harrist said.

Wyoming’s county transmission indicators are slightly different than Centers for Disease Control and Prevention measures and are adjusted to account for the state’s low population. The color-coded information is updated weekly and can be found online at <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>.

“At this time, indoor public mask use is recommended for anyone living in a yellow, orange, red or dark red area of Wyoming according to our department’s measures,” Harrist said.

Because getting a COVID-19 vaccine remains the most important and effective way to fight back against COVID-19, WDH is reminding residents that free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccinations remain readily available across Wyoming. Higher vaccination rates will help protect those who aren’t eligible for vaccination such as young children.

Convenient ways to find where to get COVID-19 vaccines include:

- Visit [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) or [vacunas.gov](https://www.vacunas.gov) online to search and find vaccine sites.
- Text your ZIP code to 438829 (GETVAX) or 822862 (VACUNA) to find up to three nearby locations that have vaccines available.
- Call the National COVID-19 Vaccination Assistance Hotline at 1-800-232-0233 for phone-based help.

A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after two doses of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or two weeks after one dose of the Janssen (Johnson and Johnson) vaccine.

More information from WDH about vaccination in Wyoming can be found at <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/immunization/wyoming-covid-19-vaccine-information/>.