

COVID-19 variants and vaccine booster dose talking points

Variants

- **We are concerned about the rise of all variants in Minnesota.** These variants can spread more easily and may cause more severe disease in unvaccinated people.
 - The predominant strain in Minnesota is the Alpha (B.1.1.7) variant, but we are also seeing increases in other variants, such as the Gamma (P.1) variant, Delta (B.1.617.2) variant, and others.
 - We have seen clusters of variant cases in different parts of the state. This will continue to happen if people have not received their vaccine, or do not take other steps to stop the spread of COVID-19.
 - We are seeing a higher rate of severe disease (hospitalizations) with the Delta variant.
 - More than 99.9% of new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, regardless of strain, are in unvaccinated Minnesotans.
- There is emerging evidence that **all of the available COVID-19 vaccines provide protection against COVID-19 variants, including the Delta variant.**
- **What will really have an impact on the variants is for people who have not yet been vaccinated to get vaccinated.** Providing protection to as many people as we can is what will help slow the spread of the virus and prevent these variants from spreading or mutating even more. This will also help protect those who are not able to get vaccinated, such as children under age 12.
- **If you're eligible, get vaccinated as soon as you can. If you are not yet vaccinated, continue to take steps to slow the spread of COVID-19 by wearing a mask, social distancing, and getting tested when recommended.** It's critical we make as much progress as possible as soon as possible in suppressing the virus.
- If you have been vaccinated and are concerned about the variants, talk to your family, friends, and neighbors to help make sure they know why it's so important for every eligible person to get vaccinated to protect our entire community.

Booster doses/additional doses of vaccine

- Medical researchers continue to gather data on how long protection from the vaccines lasts and whether any additional doses of vaccine may be needed for people who are already fully vaccinated.
- **There are currently no recommendations for people who have already been fully vaccinated to receive another vaccine dose (often called a booster dose) of any brand of vaccine.**

- This also means there is no recommendation for people who have received one type of COVID-19 vaccine to receive a dose of another type of COVID-19. For example, someone who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should not receive a dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.
- If/when CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices makes new recommendations on the need for additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine, we will share information with providers and the public.
- Until then, MDH and CDC do not recommend providers give booster doses of COVID-19 vaccine or mix vaccine products.
- There is emerging evidence that **all of the available COVID-19 vaccines provide protection against COVID-19 variants, including the Delta variant**. At this time, the single best thing Minnesotans can do to protect themselves and their communities is receive one of the highly-effective vaccines currently available.

Next phase of response

- Minnesota continues to make progress in reducing COVID-19 cases and our vaccination levels continue to rise. **However, it's important to remember that COVID-19 is not gone completely – the risk is still especially high for those who are not yet vaccinated.**
- We're transitioning into a new phase of the COVID-19 story in which we can expect outbreaks of illness among pockets of unvaccinated people.
 - Lower vaccination rates in some counties in greater Minnesota make this risk particularly worrisome there.
 - These outbreaks could tax local or regional resources.
- There is plenty of vaccine available now, and many options for places to go get a free COVID-19 vaccine. Don't miss your shot!