

## **Wearing a mask while inside in crowded rooms is a thoughtful and logical thing to do**

### **Background**

- The virus that causes COVID-19 easily spreads from person-to-person and in some people the virus causes severe illness and death.
- Initially, we only had a few ways to protect ourselves from getting sick and to prevent the spread of the virus. We wore masks, we physically distanced ourselves from others, and we washed our hands.
- The arrival of the vaccines was a gamechanger. The three currently available COVID-19 vaccines (i.e., Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson) are all great at preventing severe disease and death.
- As more and more people were vaccinated, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said that people who are vaccinated do not need to wear masks indoors.
- On July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the CDC changed this recommendation. Now they advise that under certain conditions, even fully vaccinated people should wear masks indoors. The Indiana Department of Health also makes this recommendation.

### **So, what changed?**

- The virus changed!
- The way a virus spreads inside of you is by making copies of itself. As it makes copies of itself it often makes some that are not quite perfect copies. Some of these new copies of the virus work even better than the original. These virus changes are called mutations.
- When mutations result in a virus that is easier to spread from person to person, or in a virus that is getting people sicker, we call the changed virus a **variant of interest**. The **Delta variant** (B.1.617.2) is a variant of interest as it spreads much easier than the original virus.
- While our currently available vaccines are still great at keeping people from getting very sick or dying, they are not as effective at preventing someone who is vaccinated from spreading the Delta variant to others.
- How do we know this? The CDC is seeing outbreaks of COVID-19 among fully vaccinated individuals. The reason is that the Delta Variant is very effective at making a lot of copies of itself. People with COVID-19 from the Delta Variant have more virus in the nose and mouth than people with the previous versions of the virus. Vaccinated people get infected with the Delta Variant less often than unvaccinated people, but *when* they *do* get infected, they can also have a large amount of the virus in them.
- . Cases of COVID-19 are as high as they have been since this time last year. Almost all the cases we are seeing in Indiana right now are coming from the Delta variant.

### **So, what does all this mean for you at work?**

#### **Recommendations**

- 1) If you are unvaccinated the recommendations have not changed:
  - a) You should wear a mask in public and at work

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- b) You should physically distance yourself from others when in crowded places
- c) You need to quarantine if you are in close contact\* with someone who has COVID-19
- d) You need to isolate at home if you test positive for COVID-19

If you have not been vaccinated, the pandemic has not changed for you. You are still at risk of getting sick and of spreading the virus to others.

- 1) If you are fully vaccinated some recommendations have changed
- a) If community spread is high in your area (right now it is high almost everywhere in the state) and you are in a common indoor location, **you should wear a mask**
  - b) You don't need to physically distance yourself from others if wearing a mask
  - c) You do not need to quarantine if you are in close contact\* with someone who has had COVID-19 but you should get a COVID-19 test 3-5 days after the close contact. You should also always wear a mask at work for 14 days, or until you receive a negative test result
  - d) You need to isolate at home if you test positive for COVID-19 (this has not changed)

### Common questions

If I am fully vaccinated, where do you recommend that I wear a mask?

- In common indoor locations – Places like an elevator, a small conference room, in a car with others, on public transportation, etc.
- Anywhere you want – wearing a mask is an individual decision and you can wear one anywhere in our agency. You may have unvaccinated children at home, a family member who is at risk of severe disease if they get COVID-19, or you may just not want to get sick.

If I am fully vaccinated, do I need to wear a mask outdoors?

- In most situations, No. The virus spreads less effectively outside.

If I am fully vaccinated, do I need to wear a mask in my office or at my cube?

- In general, no. Being vaccinated greatly reduces your chance of getting COVID-19 even from the Delta variant. This means that if working quietly alone at your desk you don't need a mask.

Will we have to wear masks forever at work?

- No. Right now it is only recommended to do so while community spread is high. When cases go down in our communities, we will not need to wear masks indoors.

### **SUMMARY**

- All COVID-19 vaccines are still effective at preventing severe disease and death.
- The Delta variant spreads easily so even some vaccinated people will now get and spread COVID-19.
- Because children and a lot of adults are not vaccinated, it is recommended that everyone wear masks in common indoor locations.
- This is a temporary recommendation only while community spread is high.

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\*Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. (**Exception:** In the K–12 indoor classroom setting only, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.)