

# Stay Healthy

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## Infectious Disease Experts Say How to Avoid COVID During Surge

**Get the Updated COVID Vaccine:** The CDC recommends that everyone older than six months get an updated COVID vaccine this fall. "This vaccine is not a booster. This is updating your immunity to a new variant," said Dr. Carlos del Rio, interim dean of the Emory School of Medicine. "These vaccines are really good at protecting you against severe disease, death, and hospitalization, especially people with higher risks." You can get this season's updated flu vaccine at the same time.

**If You're High-Risk, Get the Vaccine Now:** If you're older than 65 or at increased risk for severe illness from COVID, get the updated COVID vaccine now, advises Dr. Katelyn Jetelina, author of the newsletter Your Local Epidemiologist. One exception: If you've recently been infected with COVID, wait three to four months after that infection—but not more than six months.

**If You're of Average Risk, Follow This Vaccine Timing:** If you're younger than 65 and not at high risk of severe COVID, "Ideally, get vaccinated once a winter wave starts taking off," says Jetelina. "Getting it by Halloween is a good bet. This is what I will be doing with my family."

**Carry a Mask:** "Just like you would have an umbrella available in your car, have a mask in your car, in your backpack or whatever you carry, so you have one if you need it," advises Dr. Jodie

Guest, senior vice chair of the department of epidemiology at Emory's Rollins School of Public Health. "Each of these tools—vaccines, testing, masking, staying home when sick—help us live healthy and full lives with COVID still around but not disrupting our lives the way it did in the first couple of years of the pandemic."

**Always Mask When Traveling:** "There actually was a bit of time in the spring when I did get on an airplane and didn't wear a mask, and then starting in the summer, I did start wearing them again," said Guest. These days, "I would not travel and be in an airport right now without having a mask on," she said.

**At Other Times, Do a Masking Risk Assessment:** What about masking for longer periods in everyday situations, like during a trip to the grocery store? The experts suggest doing a risk assessment: How crowded is it? How long will you be there? What's the ventilation like? If it's crowded and poorly ventilated and you'll be there for an hour or more, wear a mask.



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