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COVID-19 FAQs

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These FAQs represent the most current information about COVID-19 available at the time of publication. Recommendations may change as new studies are conducted on COVID-19 and emerging variants such as the Delta variant. For the latest studies and recommendations on COVID-19, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Q: What is the Delta variant?

A: Like any virus, the COVID-19 virus is able to mutate and change over time. The Delta variant is a new strain of the COVID-19 virus that was first identified in India in December 2020 and has since spread to other parts of the world.

Q: How is the Delta variant different from other strains of the COVID-19 virus?

A: The Delta variant is known to be much more contagious than other strains.

Because it is a variant of the same virus, the symptoms are similar, and the illness it causes is treated in the same way. More studies are needed to tell if Delta variant symptoms are different from or more severe than symptoms of earlier strains.

Q: Is it possible to tell whether a COVID-19 infection is caused by the Delta variant?

A: Yes—but not with a regular COVID-19 test.

Virus strains are identified through genome sequencing. This is a special type of test that is different from the test used to confirm a diagnosis of COVID-19.

Q: How do we know whether the Delta variant is present in Victoria?

Genome sequencing is not performed on every COVID-19 virus sample, but state health authorities order a fraction of samples to be analyzed so that they can track which strains are most common. From this additional testing, it has been determined that the Delta variant accounts for about 96% of COVID-19 cases in Texas.

Because this data is only available at the state level, it is impossible to know for sure how many cases in Victoria County are caused by the Delta variant. However, we do know that the recent

increase in cases in Victoria County is similar to the surges seen in regions where the Delta variant is dominant.

Q: Are current COVID-19 vaccines effective against the Delta variant?

A: Yes. Statistics show that all three available COVID-19 vaccines provide a high level of protection against the virus, including more contagious variants such as the Delta variant. The Delta variant appears to be causing a higher number of breakthrough infections (in which a vaccinated person becomes infected), but vaccinated individuals are still highly protected compared to those who are not.

Q: If I've already had COVID-19, do I have immunity from the Delta variant?

A: More research is needed to determine the level of protection that a previous COVID-19 infection provides against the Delta variant. However, we do know that the strength and duration of natural immune responses varies greatly between different people. For this reason, most experts recommend getting a COVID-19 vaccine even if you have already been infected.

Q: Why did the CDC change its recommendation about wearing masks?

A: Studies show that vaccinated people who become infected with the Delta variant can spread the virus to others. Because of this, the CDC on July 27 recommended that everyone—regardless of vaccination status—wear a facial covering in public indoor spaces in communities that are experiencing high transmission.

Q: Is Victoria County currently experiencing high transmission?

A: Yes. A community is considered to have high transmission if more than 100 new cases are identified per 100,000 residents during a seven-day period. Victoria surpassed this metric in late July and remains in a state of high transmission.

Case count updates for Victoria County are provided Monday-Friday at <https://www.vcphd.org/page/health.covid19>.

Q: Am I required to wear a facial covering in Victoria County?

A: State regulations prohibit local governments from imposing facial covering requirements. As such, there is no city-wide or county-wide mask mandate in place. However, businesses and other organizations are free to require facial coverings at their own discretion.

Q: How do we know that facial coverings work?

A: Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, numerous peer-reviewed studies have found that masks and facial coverings, including cloth or homemade face coverings, help to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Also, studies have found a connection between widespread masking (mask mandates, etc.) and lower case counts.

The purpose of facial coverings is to stop the spread of tiny droplets that are produced when a person talks or breathes. Their primary function is to protect those who come into contact with the wearer.

Because of the wide variety of facial coverings used by the general public, it is difficult to study the effectiveness of each one. Based on what we know about how the virus spreads, a mask is considered to be more effective if it has the following traits:

- Fits snugly over the nose and mouth
- Multiple layers of fabric/double-masking
- A protective filter

Q: How do we know that the vaccines work? If vaccinated people can still contract and spread COVID-19, why should I bother getting vaccinated?

A: More than 85% of COVID-19 cases in Victoria County are in individuals who are not vaccinated (this number is updated Monday-Friday at <https://www.vcphd.org/page/health.covid19>), and about 98% of individuals who are hospitalized with COVID-19 in Victoria County are unvaccinated. These trends also holds true throughout the nation, with unvaccinated individuals accounting for the vast majority of infections and hospitalizations.

Among the few vaccinated patients who are hospitalized in Victoria County, most of them have contributing risk factors: for example, they might be older or have pre-existing health conditions.

While none of the COVID-19 vaccines is 100% effective, studies show that being vaccinated greatly reduces your risk of infection and serious illness.

Q: Compared to previous surges, what types of people are being hospitalized in Victoria County? Is it still mostly older patients?

A: Victoria hospitals are starting to see a higher percentage of younger patients with COVID-19. It is unknown if this is because of the Delta variant or because these groups are more likely to be unvaccinated or engage in risky behaviors.

Q: Are the vaccines safe?

A: Yes. Each of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines has been thoroughly tested and has been administered to millions of people. Health officials are closely monitoring vaccine recipients for any adverse side effects.

A very small number of vaccine recipients have developed serious side effects, such as blood clots or myocarditis. However, the vast majority experience no side effects or mild side effects. For this reason, the benefits of the vaccine are considered to outweigh the risk.

You can read more about COVID-19 vaccine testing and side effects in this report from Johns Hopkins Medicine: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/is-the-covid19-vaccine-safe>

According to the CDC, “Vaccine monitoring has historically shown that side effects generally happen within six weeks of receiving a vaccine dose. For this reason, the FDA required each of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines to be studied for at least two months (eight weeks) after the

final dose. Millions of people have received COVID-19 vaccines, and no long-term side effects have been detected.”