

Community Column

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Now more than ever, it's important to get vaccinated

By Cynthia Morrow, MD, MPH

Nationally, the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant is causing a surge in cases of COVID-19. Virginia cases [have increased nearly ten times from our mid-June numbers](#). The majority of coronavirus cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in the U.S., Virginia, and locally are occurring in people who are not fully vaccinated. The percent of fully vaccinated adults in Virginia varies widely by locality, ranging from 35% to 72%. Among the jurisdictions in the Roanoke City and Alleghany Health Districts, as of August 7, our uptake rates range from 43% of the adult population who are fully vaccinated in Craig County to 64% in Roanoke County.

Evidence shows that COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. are safe and very effective in protecting people against severe disease, hospitalization, and death associated with COVID-19. While coronavirus infections in people who are fully vaccinated are not common, they do occur because no vaccine works 100% of the time. Some conditions make a breakthrough infection more likely in a vaccinated person: more virus circulating in the community, lower vaccination rates, and more highly transmissible variants. In addition, a concern about the Delta variant is that new evidence shows that some fully vaccinated people who are infected with this strain of the virus can spread it to others.

Because the Delta variant is much more contagious than the original strain of COVID-19 and because even fully vaccinated people who do get infected may be able to spread the virus, the [CDC is now calling for more mask-wearing](#). What science supports masking after vaccination? Masks help stop the spread of germs. They are a literal layer of protection between you and any virus in the air. It's simple- masks can help prevent any respiratory infections, including COVID-19.

I really understand that shifting recommendations can be confusing and even frustrating. The reason that the recommendations change is because this dangerous virus keeps changing as it continues to reproduce. We need to continue to adapt our strategies to an ever-adapting virus. At this point, the only thing that is going to stop this virus is if everyone who is eligible to be vaccinated gets vaccinated and if we wear masks and physically distance until our vaccination rates are high enough to stop the pandemic.

We are fortunate that we have the tools to stop this pandemic, the most effective

of which is the vaccine. Our ability to finally beat this terrible virus depends only on one thing: All of us doing our part by using the tools we have available to us.

Back to School: As August is National Immunization Awareness Month, it is a good time to remind those going back to school that school-required vaccines have changed for the 2021–2022 school year. Starting this school year, Virginia students will need vaccines to protect against meningococcal disease, human papillomavirus (HPV), and hepatitis A, in addition to previously required immunizations. Without these vaccinations, children will not be able to start school on time or go to daycare. For more information, please visit [VDH's Healthy Back to School Campaign](#) website for more details on this and other health resources for children.