

Interim VDH Community Mitigation Framework

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The guidance provides a framework for localities, health districts, and health regions as they consider the appropriate community-level actions needed to mitigate local transmission of COVID-19. The most important public health action to end the pandemic is increasing vaccination coverage. Vaccination saves lives, prevents severe illness, and reduces the spread of COVID-19. To complement vaccination, particularly during times of increased transmission and while certain populations are not yet eligible to be vaccinated, this guide focuses primarily on recommended community-level interventions and strategies. This guide does not address widespread vaccination strategies or routine containment procedures (for contact tracing, quarantine, and isolation) needed to prevent further transmission of COVID-19.

Regardless of the level of community transmission, individuals aged two or older who are not fully vaccinated should continue to take all COVID-19 precautions and be advised to [wear a mask \(with few exceptions\)](#) and practice physical distancing (at least 6 feet) when in any indoor public spaces and also in any outdoor crowded areas. Fully vaccinated individuals who have an underlying condition or are taking medications that weaken the immune system should also continue to take all [precautions](#) recommended for unvaccinated people until advised otherwise by their healthcare provider.

During [substantial or high transmission](#), all individuals aged two or older, including fully vaccinated people, should be advised to wear a mask indoors in any public setting. Individuals can further lower their risk of COVID-19 by choosing safer activities for themselves and for their children who may not be fully vaccinated yet (e.g., choosing outdoor activities with others rather than indoor activities).

Regardless of vaccination status or level of transmission, individuals should always be encouraged to practice good hand hygiene, stay at home when experiencing [symptoms](#), and [seek testing](#) when indicated.

Widespread community-level mitigation strategies, such as mandated capacity restrictions and universal mask/distancing requirements, have played a critical role in reducing transmission rates and lowering the overall disease burden of COVID-19 throughout Virginia. Despite tremendous progress in vaccination, localities should continually plan and prepare for any future changes in disease activity in their communities. Although vaccines currently available in the U.S. are effective against severe illness and death from the Delta virus and other variants currently circulating in the U.S., new COVID-19 variants can occur, particularly in areas where vaccination rates remain low. Local health districts need to have the ability to quickly offer recommendations on dialing up or down community-level mitigation strategies to adapt to changing conditions and impacts.

This guidance is intended to supplement and not replace any setting-specific recommendations maintained by VDH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Mitigation strategies and considerations for specific settings (e.g., [PreK-12 school settings](#)) should be reviewed in addition to this guidance.

Community-level mitigation strategies should be guided by four main factors:

1. Levels of Community Transmission
2. Local Vaccination Coverage
3. Local Outbreak Trends
4. Health System Capacity

1. Levels of Community Transmission: Level of community transmission may be used as an indicator to prompt implementation of an appropriate mitigation strategy. To find your current level of community transmission by locality, refer to the [VDH Level of Community Transmission](#) dashboard. An alternative source of this information is the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#). There are minor discrepancies between the CDC COVID Data Tracker and the VDH Level of Community Transmission dashboard mostly due to timing of data publication.

Table 1: Level of Community Transmission

Indicator ¹	Low	Moderate	Substantial	High
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days ²	0-9	10-49	50-99	≥100
Percentage of NAATs that are positive during the past 7 days ³	<5.0%	5.0%-7.9%	8.0%-9.9%	≥10.0%

¹If the two indicators suggest different levels, the actions corresponding to the higher threshold should be chosen. County-level data on total new cases in the past 7 days and test percent positivity are available on the County View tab in [CDC's COVID Data Tracker](#).

²Total number of new cases per 100,000 persons within the last 7 days is calculated by adding the number of new cases in the county (or other community type) in the last 7 days divided by the population in the county (or other community type) and multiplying by 100,000.

³Percentage of positive diagnostic and screening nucleic acid amplification tests (NAAT) during the last 7 days is calculated by dividing the number of positive tests in the county (or other administrative level) during the last 7 days by the total number of tests resulted over the last 7 days.

Depending on the level of community transmission (low/moderate/substantial/high), consider and select the appropriate mitigation strategies to recommend (Table 2). Prevention measures should be layered and used together to achieve the greatest benefit. Decision makers should only consider relaxation of mitigation strategies after several (at least two, although 4 weeks is best) weeks of continuous sustained improvement in the level of community transmission. In areas with low or no COVID-19 transmission and with testing and contact tracing capacity in place to detect early introduction or increases in spread of the virus, layered prevention strategies might be removed one at a time while monitoring closely for any evidence that COVID-19 cases are increasing.

Table 2: Mitigation Strategies Based on Level of Community Transmission

Level of Community Transmission	Mitigation Strategies/Options
Low	Teach and promote basic prevention precautions for COVID-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent masking and distancing among individuals aged 2+ who are not fully vaccinated ● Regular handwashing ● Appropriate ventilation when indoors ● Regular cleaning ● Stay at home if sick and get tested
Moderate	Teach and promote basic prevention precautions for COVID-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent masking and distancing among individuals aged 2+ who are not fully vaccinated ● Regular handwashing ● Appropriate ventilation when indoors ● Regular cleaning ● Stay at home if sick and get tested Consider telework and virtual meetings where feasible
Substantial	In addition to promoting basic prevention precautions, consider : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promoting universal masking (regardless of vaccination status) in any indoor settings with others ● Promoting universal distancing (regardless of vaccination status) in any indoor settings with others ● Reducing capacity at public venues ● Limiting number of attendees at social gatherings ● Encouraging telework and virtual meetings <i>A press release/advisory could be issued recommending any or all of the above.</i>
High	In addition to basic prevention precautions, strongly consider : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promoting or requiring universal masking (regardless of vaccination status) in any indoor settings with others ● Promoting or requiring universal distancing (regardless of vaccination status) in any indoor settings with others ● Reducing capacity at public venues ● Limiting number of attendees at social gatherings ● Issuing stay at home advisories or local orders ● Closures of settings that involve congregation of unmasked individuals, such as indoor dining or bar areas where distancing is not feasible <i>A press release/advisory or local order (if applicable) could be issued recommending/requiring any or all of the above.</i>

*This table does not apply to school settings. All community mitigation strategies should be exhausted before closing schools to in-person learning. School administrators should refer to [PreK-12 school settings](#) for additional guidance for schools.

2. Local Vaccination Coverage: Monitor vaccination coverage to help determine the need to implement additional mitigation strategies in your area. Although CDC does not have defined levels of “low” vs “high”, CDC provides five increasing levels of vaccination coverage (0-29.9%, 30-39.9%, 40-49.9%, 50-69.9%, and 70%+). Decision makers should monitor vaccine coverage on the [VDH Vaccination Data Dashboard](#). Localities with low coverage may wish to consider implementing additional community mitigation strategies. For example, a locality with <50% of the population fully vaccinated could consider implementing strict distancing at public indoor events, in addition to other prevention strategies already in place.

3. Local Outbreak Trends: If cases among settings with people at risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 increase (e.g., among settings with people aged 65+ or with [underlying medical conditions](#)), certain prevention strategies may need to be intensified or re-implemented.

4. Health System Capacity: Data on health system usage can also signal when urgent implementation of layered prevention strategies might be necessary to prevent overloading the health care system. Together with public health officials, localities should coordinate closely with public health officials and health systems in their community to monitor local health system capacity. If health system capacity is reaching concerning capacity levels, localities should consider community-wide application of additional prevention strategies.

References:

Christie A, Brooks JT, Hicks LA, et al. *Guidance for Implementing COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in the Context of Varying Community Transmission Levels and Vaccination Coverage*. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2021;70:1044–1047. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7030e2>

Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 28 July 2021, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html