

COVID-19 and Mental Health

Maintaining one's mental health is an essential part of achieving overall well-being. The link below provides resources that will be helpful in connecting individuals with people who can benefit from talking about how they are feeling. There is also information about the virtual support groups and hotlines that are available through various organizations. <https://www.nj211.org/covid-19-and-mental-health>

COVID-19 Activity

The rate of transmission in NJ has **increased to 1.41**. Any transmission rate above 1.0 is concerning and indicates that each infected person is passing the virus to at least one other person. The higher the number, the greater the risk of viral spread throughout the community. **As of December 23, 2021, all six (6) regions of the State, including our Northwest Region, are still classified as HIGH (orange) COVID Activity.**

For the latest Statewide and Regional COVID Activity Report that specifies the Risk Levels by Region (usually updated by the State each Thursday), please click the following link: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/>

The rate of new COVID infections in all of the municipalities within the Pequannock Health Department's jurisdiction are sharply rising and this sustained trend over the last four weeks is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

The spread of COVID is largely driven by a combination of the following factors:

- Many within the population who remain **unvaccinated or without booster shots**
- COVID outbreaks involving the highly contagious Delta variant, and now the new Omicron variant which is well over twice as contagious than Delta, and now accounts for over 73% of all sequenced COVID infections in the United States.
- Breakthrough Infections among the vaccinated (the vaccines are safe and effective against infection from variants, including the highly contagious Delta and Omicron Variants. They are especially effective in **protecting against severe illness, hospitalization, and death**)
- Lifted or relaxed restrictions and diminished practice of protective precautions
- More indoor congregating in less ventilated spaces resulting from seasonably cooler weather.

Please see the **links below for the NJDOH COVID Activity Dashboard, the NJ Regional COVID Activity Reports and the links to the Morris and Passaic County Health Department COVID Websites.** Morris County links include daily updates of cumulative numbers of cases by municipality and the COVID Activity and Risk Level in each of the State's six regions.

NJDOH Dashboard:

https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_dashboard.shtml

Statewide and Regional COVID Activity Report and Risk Level by Region:

<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/>

Morris County-Based COVID Information including Data for Total Positive Cases by Municipality and COVID Testing Availability:

<https://health.morriscountynj.gov/coronavirus/>

The Delta and Omicron Variants

The Delta Variant and its sub-variants, are nearly twice as contagious as the UK variant, which is approximately 40% more contagious than the original COVID strain. In regards to the Omicron variant, early studies and the

available information indicates that it is over twice as contagious as the Delta variant. Omicron is outcompeting and actually replacing the Delta variant in the U.S., just as it had in South Africa.

Omicron has already been detected throughout the United States, including New Jersey. Many experts believe that **Omicron may replace Delta** as the dominant strain globally, within the next 6 to 8 weeks. Early indications also show that **omicron may produce only mild illness in most people**. It will still take approximately another week or two to confirm these clinical characteristics. The hope is that in the best case scenario, Omicron will be proven to produce only mild illness and by being much more contagious, will smother out and replace the Delta variant. This **could in effect end the pandemic** and leave us with another endemic coronavirus similar to the four endemic coronaviruses that now circulate the globe and only produce symptoms of the common cold. While it is still **too early to tell**, there is reason to feel some level of optimism based on the early information now available.

The most important thing you can do to protect yourself from the Delta and Omicron variants is to **get fully vaccinated and get your booster shot**. Studies indicate that the Pfizer mRNA and the Moderna mRNA vaccine, have some effectiveness, though substantially diminished, against Omicron. However, studies have also shown that third shot boosters of these vaccines may **give strong protection against both the Delta and Omicron variants, especially against severe illness, hospitalization, and death**.

Use of Masks and Other Important Safety Precautions

Please see the link below to the CDC recommendation for the use of masks indoor for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals when regional transmission is substantial or high. There is now a sustained high (orange) level of community transmission within our region of NJ. The newest projections indicate sustained and drastic increases in rates of infection for at least the next 6 to 9 weeks. **The highly contagious, quickly sweeping Omicron variant will be the primary driver in the coming days and months:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

Who Should Wear a Mask?

- People, including children older than 2, should wear a mask in indoor public places if they are:
 - Not fully vaccinated
 - Fully vaccinated and in an area with substantial or high transmission
 - Fully vaccinated and with weakened immune systems
- In general, you do not need to wear a mask in outdoor settings.
 - In areas with [high numbers of COVID-19 cases](#), consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings and for activities with [close contact](#) with others who are not fully vaccinated.

Other Important Precautions

It's time for everyone to redouble their efforts in practicing these basic and effective precautions listed below. These precautions will help to protect against both **the flu** and the **most contagious COVID variant to date**:

- Get vaccinated!
- Get boosted!
- Distancing six or more feet
- Wearing masks/face coverings when appropriate, as described above
- Keep indoor spaces well ventilated to the greatest extent possible
- Practicing hand hygiene
- Avoiding touching the eyes, nose or mouth
- Disinfecting commonly touched surfaces
- Staying home when symptomatic

- Get tested when appropriate
- Following all of the requirements and advisories set forth in the Executive Orders, Executive Directives and Travel Advisories.
- Adhering to isolation and quarantine recommendations and orders from the Health Department's contact tracers and disease investigators.
- Strengthen the immune system by:
 - Getting good nutrition. Consult your healthcare provider about supplementing with Vitamin D, Vitamin C, and zinc
 - Getting enough sleep
 - Exercising
 - Maintaining mental health
 - Keeping on schedule with healthcare visits

COVID-19 Testing

NO-COST COVID TESTING IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR ALL NEW JERSEY RESIDENTS!

New Jersey and Vault Medical Services have teamed up to offer at-home COVID-19 saliva testing for any person who believes they need to be tested, with or without symptoms, at no cost.

- [Order a free saliva-based PCR test, shipped directly to your home at no cost.](#)
- [Find a list of free, public testing sites, including pop-up testing sites.](#)

For additional information on testing, please see the following links:

- [Morris County](https://www.morriscountynj.gov/Residents/Health/Coronavirus/Get-a-Covid-19-Test): For more information, please see the Morris County website at <https://www.morriscountynj.gov/Residents/Health/Coronavirus/Get-a-Covid-19-Test>

Updated COVID-19 Vaccination Information

- **Get Your Booster Shot As Soon As Possible!**

Booster Shots for All Three Vaccines that are Approved for Use in the U.S. are Now Available to Those who are Eligible

The CDC has recommended boosters for all three vaccines be made available and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has amended the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the **Pfizer-BioNTech** mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine **and** the **Moderna** mRNA vaccine, to be administered as a single booster dose **at least six months** after completion of the primary series. The authorization also applies to the **J&J Janssen vaccine**, to be administered as a single booster dose **at least two months** after the primary shot.

Those who are **eligible** include the following:

- individuals 65 years of age and older;
- individuals 18 through 64 years of age at high risk of severe COVID-19; and
- individuals 18 through 64 years of age whose frequent institutional (such as long term care and congregate facilities) or occupational (such as healthcare and first responders) exposure to SARS-CoV-2 puts them at high risk of serious complications of COVID-19, including severe COVID-19.
- Individuals who are 16 to 17 years of age are now eligible under an FDA authorization and CDC recommendation as of December 10th for Pfizer boosters.

Individuals 18+ may choose any of the vaccines to serve as their booster, as mixing and matching is considered acceptable. For more information from the CDC about the COVID boosters, please click on the following link:

➤ **CDC Recommends a Third Dose of COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines for those who are Moderately to Severely Immunocompromised**

CDC has recommended that people whose immune systems are moderately to severely compromised should receive an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) at least 28 days after the second dose of [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#) or [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#) or an additional dose of J&J Janssen vaccine at least two months after the primary dose.

People should consult with their healthcare provider about their medical condition, and whether getting an additional dose is appropriate for them. As with the mRNA two-dose series and the single dose of J&J Janssen, [serious side effects are rare](#), but may occur.

➤ **Get Vaccinated! For those who are Unvaccinated, Getting Vaccinated will Give a High Level of Protection to your Family, Friends and Community. An Abundance of Appointments are Available, It's Quick and Easy!**

The vaccine is **highly effective** in protecting against infection and even more so from severe illness, hospitalization, and death. The impact of the pandemic on every sector of our society has been devastating. These impacts have included increased rates of suicide, drug addiction, alcoholism, depression, emotional and psychological distress, among other negative economic and societal impacts. **The quicker this pandemic is eradicated, the quicker our nation will heal and grow. The greatest way to do this, is through vaccination.**

“Fully vaccinated” still means two-doses of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or one dose of J and J vaccine and a booster is not required to be considered fully vaccinated, at this time. However, booster shots are strongly recommended. It will take at least a two-week period after the first shot of J and J or the second shot of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine to provide the maximum level of immunity. It is the same timeframe with the booster shots. Whether or not you are vaccinated, it's important to follow CDC prevention guidelines that are available for **vaccinated** and **unvaccinated** people.

All three vaccines authorized in the United States are available to everyone 18 and older. Those 5 to 17 years old are only authorized to receive an age-appropriate dose of [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#).

➤ **There are Multiple Ways to Get Vaccinated. Appointment Based or Walk-up clinics are Now Easily Accessible**

- For up-to-date vaccine locations in New Jersey, please visit covid19.nj.gov/finder.

➤ **Chain Pharmacies, Healthcare Systems and Other Outlets have Enough Vaccine to Meet the Demand. Vaccine Supply is Plentiful and Appointments are Easy to Get. Please Get Vaccinated!**

- Many Healthcare Systems and Chain pharmacies, such as CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid, Walmart are now welcoming **walk-ins**.

➤ **Atlantic Health System Vaccination Centers**

- Atlantic Health System Vaccination Centers may continue to be open for limited hours in Clark, Hackettsown, Morristown, Mountain Lakes, Newton and Pompton Plains.
- Go to the following link to make an appointment: atlanticealth.org/covidvaccine . Walk-ins may be permitted at select locations on certain days. Additional COVID-19 information and vaccine updates from Atlantic Health System are also available on their webpage.

Quarantine Protocols for Those Who've Been Exposed to Someone Who Tested COVID Positive

1. CDC and NJDOH continue to recommend a 14-day quarantine period as the preferred standard for persons who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, unless they are fully vaccinated or recently recovered from COVID-19. However, a shortened quarantine period, as described below, may also be available.

2. Persons not needing to quarantine:

A. COVID-19 positive (lab-confirmed viral test) within 3 months: Persons who tested positive for COVID-19 (lab-confirmed viral test), clinically recovered from COVID-19 and then have close contact with someone with COVID-19 within 3 months does not need to be quarantined or retested. However, persons who have close contact with someone with COVID-19 more than 3 months after the initial infection should quarantine.

B. Fully Vaccinated Persons: Vaccinated persons should continue to follow current guidance to protect themselves and others, including covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands often, following CDC travel guidance, and following any applicable workplace or school guidance, including guidance related to personal protective equipment use and SARS-CoV-2 testing. However, fully vaccinated persons who have close contact with someone with COVID-19 do NOT need to quarantine if they meet all of the following criteria:

- 1) Are fully vaccinated (i.e., ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or ≥ 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine), **AND**
- 2) Have remained asymptomatic since the current COVID-19 exposure.

Persons who **do not** meet the above criteria should continue to follow current quarantine guidance after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Fully vaccinated persons who do not quarantine should still watch for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure. If they experience symptoms, they should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing, if indicated.

CDC and NJDOH continue to recommend a 14-day quarantine period for persons who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, unless they are fully vaccinated or recently recovered from COVID-19.

Those who have been determined to be a close contact to a COVID -19 positive individual **and who are fully vaccinated** should monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Masks should also be worn indoors in public for 14 days following exposure. It is also recommended that a COVID test be taken 5 to 7 days from the date of last exposure. Should symptoms develop or for those who test positive, a 10 day **isolation** period from the date of symptom onset or if asymptomatic, from date of the positive test, should be completed.

3. Shortened Quarantine - While a 14-day quarantine period is optimal, **NJDOH considers the CDC options to shorten quarantine to be acceptable alternatives** in most community settings (refer to the section on High Risk Congregate Care Settings in the attachment for exceptions). Persons who have close contact with someone with COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status should be tested 5-7 days after the last exposure (unless recently recovered).

A. Options for shortening quarantine only apply if **no** COVID-19 symptoms develop during the quarantine period. If symptoms develop, the individual should self-isolate, contact a healthcare provider and be tested for COVID-19. Additionally, individuals should continue to self-monitor for symptoms for the full 14-days.

B. Acceptable options to shorten quarantine include:

- 1) **7-Day quarantine with testing.** Unvaccinated persons can end quarantine after Day 7 after receiving a negative COVID-19 test result collected between Day 5 and Day 7. Quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.

2) **10-Day quarantine without testing.** Unvaccinated persons can end quarantine after Day 10 if they haven't been tested for COVID-19

3. The NJDOH Communicable Disease Service has also updated **COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools**. This information will be available on the COVID-19 Information for Schools website at https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schools.shtml.

A. Key Updates for Schools:

1) **Alternative Diagnosis**

Evaluation by a health care provider is necessary to confirm a diagnosis of COVID-19, establish an alternative diagnosis, and to determine the need for COVID-19 testing. Clinical evaluation and/or testing for COVID-19 may be considered for ANY COVID-19 compatible symptoms, depending on suspicion of illness from a health care provider. Testing is strongly recommended, especially when there are multiple unlinked cases in the school and during periods of moderate and high levels of community transmission.

During moderate and high transmission levels, individuals with COVID-19 compatible symptoms **and no known exposure to a COVID-19 case in the last 14 days**, regardless of vaccination status, may follow the [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school **only if they have an alternative diagnosis** (i.e., strep throat, influenza, worsening of chronic illness) supported by clinical evaluation.

2) **Reduced Exclusion for Close Contacts**

While a 14-day quarantine period is optimal, NJDOH considers the CDC options to shorten quarantine to be acceptable alternatives in the school setting.

During all levels of community transmission and during outbreaks, excluded individuals who are close contacts of staff or students who tested positive for COVID-19 and who are asymptomatic may use a reduced exclusion period of 10 days (or 7 days with negative test results collected at 5-7 days) but must continue to monitor for symptoms for 14 days after exposure.

Definition of Close Contact to a COVID Positive Individual

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has established criteria for what constitutes a "Close Contact" to someone who is a COVID-19 positive individual. It is defined as – **"a total of 15 minutes or more of close contact exposure (6 feet or closer) to an infected person during a 24-hour period"**. Those who have been determined to be a close contact to a COVID -19 positive individual **must quarantine for a period of not less than 14 days**. However, when Regions of the State are at the MODERATE (yellow) COVID Activity classification or the LOW (green) COVID Activity Classification, institutions and organizations may choose to adopt the abbreviated quarantine time frames set forth by the CDC and NJDOH, of a 7 day quarantine from last date of exposure with a negative test taken between days 5 and 7, or without testing, a 10 day quarantine from last date of exposure.

In classroom settings in **K through 12 schools**, criteria for what constitutes a "Close Contact" is "a total of 15 minutes or more of close contact exposure (3 feet or closer) to an infected person during a 24-hour period". **Please see the attached guidance document from the CDC "Steps for Determining Close Contact Quarantine K-12"**.

Contact Tracing and Disease Investigation

The NJ Department of Health (NJDOH) has provided additional contact tracers to our local Health Department from the State work force. They support the operation while under the direction of the Pequannock Health Department's nurse supervisors.

School and University Operations While Addressing COVID Outbreaks

The Pequannock Health Department is working closely with these institutions to contact trace, investigate, isolate, and quarantine individuals to quickly contain any spread of the COVID-19 virus that may be identified within these institutions. Many institutions of higher learning are requiring students to be fully COVID Vaccinated in order to be permitted on campus. Pfizer has received an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the FDA to allow vaccinations of those who are 5 years of age and up. Other vaccines are undergoing clinical trials for those under 18 and may soon also receive an EUA from the FDA. State vaccination mandates for students under 18 years of age are **not** expected, at this time.

Attendance at Gatherings

If you are fully vaccinated, you can participate in many of the activities that you did before the pandemic. **Especially during this holiday season**, all individuals whether vaccinated or not, should:

- [Wear a mask](#) when appropriate, wash your hands, practice social distancing, and stay home if you are sick.
- Indoor gatherings are particularly dangerous places for the virus to spread. Host outdoor activities rather than indoor activities as much as possible.
- If you do host indoors, increase ventilation by opening windows and doors or by placing central air and heating on continuous circulation rather than recirculated air.
- The smaller the gathering is, the less likely it is that someone is infected and put loved ones at risk.
- Require guests to wear masks when not eating, whether indoors or in crowded outdoor areas.
- Plan ahead and ask guests to avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.
- Delay travel until you are fully vaccinated based on CDC guidance. For more information, refer to the [CDC's guidance for domestic travel](#).
- Guests should avoid direct contact, including handshakes and hugs, with others outside their household.
- Make hand sanitizer available for guests.
- Gatherings that last longer pose more risk than shorter gatherings.
- Remind guests to wash their hands before serving or eating food.
- Use single-use hand towels or paper towels for drying hands so guests do not share a towel.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and any shared items between use when feasible.
- Consider keeping a list of guests who attended for potential future contact tracing needs. If you are called by a contact tracer, it's critical that you answer the call to protect us all. Your help is the key to stopping the spread of COVID-19 and saving lives.

Data suggests the Omicron variant is far more transmissible even among vaccinated individuals, than all other COVID variants to date. **Face masks are strongly recommended for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals in indoor settings** where there is an increased risk, especially when the region of the State is classified to have a **substantial or high COVID risk**.

As no vaccine is 100% effective, people must balance preventive actions to reduce possible transmission and maintain safety. People who have a weakened immune system should discuss whether they should continue precautions with their healthcare provider. The combination of COVID-19 vaccination and [continued precautions to protect yourself and others](#) will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19.

Travel

While the NJDOH has lifted its travel advisory for travel, the CDC travel guidelines are still recommended for domestic and international travel.

Travelers and residents returning from any U.S. state or territory beyond the immediate region (New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Delaware) should follow the [recommendations from the CDC](#).

It is **strongly recommended** that international travelers and residents who have returned to the U.S. from foreign countries follow the [recommendations from the CDC](#).

For more CDC/NJDOH Travel Advisory Information please follow the links below:

NJDOH

<https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/travel-and-transportation/are-there-travel-restrictions-to-or-from-new-jersey>

CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>

Health & Safety Recommendations For Businesses and Workplaces

Last Updated: 09/21/2021

The NJ Department of Health has issued industry-specific health and safety recommendations for:

- [Amusement Parks, Arcades, and Playgrounds](#)
- [Bars and Restaurants](#)
- [Gyms](#)
- [Personal Care Services](#)
- [Pools and Aquatic Facilities](#)

General public health and safety recommendations that businesses and workplaces might consider to better protect employees and customers:

- Businesses are encouraged to follow [CDC safety guidelines and social distancing](#) to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Masks are not required for most indoor workplaces, however businesses should encourage unvaccinated employees, customers, and guests to wear masks.
- If masks or gloves are required by employers, businesses are encouraged to provide them to employees
- Businesses are encouraged to provide approved sanitization materials for employees and visitors at no cost to those individuals
- Employees should practice hand hygiene and employers should provide employees with sufficient break time for that purpose
- Routine cleaning and disinfection of all high-touch areas is encouraged in accordance with DOH and [CDC guidelines](#)
- Conduct daily health checks, such as temperature screenings, visual symptom checking, self-assessment checklists, and/or health questionnaires, consistent with CDC guidance, prior to each shift
- Employers are encouraged to keep sick employees from entering the workplace and follow requirements of applicable leave laws
- Encourage sick employees to stay home
- Employers should promptly notify employees of any known exposure to COVID-19 at the worksite

Businesses have the right to require stricter mask policies, but businesses are not allowed to restrict the use of face masks by their staff, customers, or visitors. Municipalities and counties are also permitted to impose stricter requirements on masking in businesses open to the public.

Social distancing, masking, and other safety measures are still required in high-risk areas such as [healthcare settings](#), [public transportation](#), [child care centers](#), [correctional facilities](#), and homeless shelters.

For more safety tips, refer to the [CDC's COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#).

Executive Orders

Executive Order 271-Governor Murphy Directs Vaccination or Testing Requirements for All State Contract Employees

All State contract employees must maintain a policy that requires all covered workers to either provide adequate proof to the covered setting that they have been fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum one to two times weekly. This order is effective immediately.

Executive Order 264-Governor Murphy Directs Vaccination or Testing Requirements for All Childcare Center Personnel

All Childcare Centers must maintain a policy that requires all covered workers to either provide adequate proof to the covered setting that they have been fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum one to two times weekly. This requirement shall take effect on November 1, 2021, at which time any covered workers that have not provided adequate proof that they are fully vaccinated must submit to a minimum of weekly or twice weekly testing on an ongoing basis until fully vaccinated.

Executive Order 253-Governor Murphy Directs Vaccination or Testing Requirements for All Preschool to Grade 12 Personnel and for All State Workers

All State workers and All public, private, and parochial preschool programs, and elementary and secondary schools, including charter and renaissance schools (“covered settings”), must maintain a policy that requires all covered workers to either provide adequate proof to the covered setting that they have been fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum one to two times weekly. This requirement shall take effect on October 18, 2021 at which time any covered workers that have not provided adequate proof that they are fully vaccinated must submit to a minimum of weekly or twice weekly testing on an ongoing basis until fully vaccinated.

Executive Order 252-Governor Murphy Directs Vaccination Requirements in Health Care Facilities and High-Risk Congregate Settings

Covered health care and high-risk congregate settings must maintain a policy that requires covered workers to either provide adequate proof that they have been fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum one to two times weekly. This requirement shall take effect on September 7, 2021, at which time any covered workers that have not provided adequate proof that they are fully vaccinated must submit to weekly or twice weekly testing on an ongoing basis until fully vaccinated.

Executive Order 251-Governor Murphy Announces Mask Requirements for the beginning of the 2021/2022 School Year

All public, private, and parochial preschool programs and elementary and secondary schools, including charter and renaissance schools (collectively “school districts”), must maintain a policy regarding mandatory use of face masks by staff, students, and visitors in the indoor portion of the school district premises, except in certain circumstances, as specified in the Order.

*Please note, Executive Orders may be issued by the Governor at any time to establish or relax restrictions on certain businesses, social activities and gatherings. For up to date and more complete information, **please refer to the entire contents of the Executive Orders and Executive Directives listed at the links below.***

Please see the link below for all Executive Orders to date:

https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html

Please see the link below for an up to date list of Executive Directives of the NJDOH:

<https://www.state.nj.us/health/legal/covid19/>