

# COVID-19 Variants

## What are variants?

Like all viruses, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, constantly changes through mutation. These mutations add up and create slightly different versions of the virus, called “variants”. Sometimes, a mutation will result in the virus spreading more easily, making people sicker or making it resistant to treatment or vaccines. Variants with these types of mutations are called variants of concern. Scientists continue to study and track these variants as they evolve.

## Which variants have been found in the United States?

The CDC is tracking a number of variants of concern in the United States. These include:

Variant name:	First detected:	First found in the US:
<b>Alpha</b> (B.1.1.7)	United Kingdom	December 2020
<b>Beta</b> (B.1.351)	South Africa	January 2021
<b>Gamma</b> (P.1)	In travelers from Brazil	January 2021
<b>Delta</b> (B.1.617.2)	India	March 2021

Visit the CDC [Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19](#) page for more information.

## Are these new variants more dangerous?

It depends. These variants are a serious threat to adults who are not fully vaccinated<sup>1</sup>, especially those who are at [higher risk of severe COVID-19 disease](#). The Delta variant is concerning because it seems to be spreading much more easily than the original virus and other variants. It may also cause more severe infections, including those that lead to hospitalization. The Delta variant is becoming more common in the US, including in Los Angeles County. Everyone should focus on slowing its spread until we better understand how the Delta variant is spreading and who it is infecting.

## Do COVID-19 vaccines protect against variants, including the Delta variant?

It appears so. The CDC and other experts continue to study how well the vaccines work to protect people from COVID-19 in real-world conditions. So far, the CDC has found that all 3 vaccines authorized for use in the US are highly effective, even against the Delta variant, at preventing serious illness and death. But there is evidence that those who have not completed their Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine series (i.e., they only got the first dose) are not as well-protected from COVID-19 variants. The CDC says there is currently no information to suggest that a second dose is needed for those who got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, even with the Delta variant, but they will continue to monitor this.

## How do I protect myself against variants?

- **Get vaccinated** if you are 12 years of age or older (see below). The three COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the US offer the best protection against the variants currently spreading here. If you have concerns

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<sup>1</sup> You are considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19 two (2) weeks after: the second dose of a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine series, a single dose of Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine or you finished the series of a COVID-19 vaccine that has been listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization. See [fully vaccinated](#) web page for more information.

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or questions about COVID-19 vaccines, talk with your doctor. If you are already vaccinated, encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to get vaccinated. Vaccination will slow the spread of variants and decrease the chances that new, even more dangerous variants emerge.

- **Wear a mask.** Masks remain a powerful tool to protect yourself and others. Until we know more about the Delta variant, it is required that everyone, regardless of vaccination status wear masks indoors in public places. Your mask should fit snugly over your nose and mouth and be made of at least two layers so that they filter well. If you are in a setting where you are in sustained close contact with other people who may not be fully vaccinated, consider “double masking” (wearing a cloth face mask over a surgical mask) or a respirator (e.g., N95 or KN95). These offer a higher level of protection. This is especially important if you are not fully vaccinated and are indoors or in a crowded outdoor place. Some exceptions apply - learn more at [ph.lacounty.gov/masks](http://ph.lacounty.gov/masks).
- **Wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer often** - especially after being in public spaces where surfaces are touched by many people.

## How do I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccines are available across LA County and free to everyone, regardless of immigration status. Many vaccination sites take walk-ins, or you can choose to make an appointment.

- Visit [www.VaccinateLACounty.com](http://www.VaccinateLACounty.com) to find a location near you.
- Call **1-833-540-0473** if you need help making an appointment, need transportation to a vaccination site, or are homebound. Phone lines are open from 8am to 8:30pm 7 days a week. Information is also available in many languages 24/7 by calling 2-1-1.