

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:
Alpha (B.1.1.7)	United Kingdom	December 2020
Beta (B.1.351)	South Africa	January 2021
Gamma (P.1)	In travellers from Brazil	January 2021
Delta (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 vaccinated¹, 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 Santa Barbara 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.

¹ You are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 when 2 weeks have passed since your second dose of the two-dose Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, a one-dose vaccine.

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Should I get tested if I have symptoms of COVID-19, even if I am fully vaccinated?

Although the risk that fully vaccinated people could become infected with COVID-19 is low, any fully vaccinated person who experiences [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) should [isolate themselves from others](#), be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, and tested if indicated. The symptomatic fully vaccinated person should inform their healthcare provider of their vaccination status at the time they seek care.

Fully vaccinated people with no COVID-like symptoms following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19

Most fully vaccinated people with no COVID-like symptoms do not need to [quarantine](#), be restricted from work, or be tested following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, as their risk of infection is low. However, they should still monitor for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) for 14 days following an exposure.

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 or questions about COVID-19 vaccines, talk with your doctor. If you are already vaccinated, encourage your family, friends, and neighbours 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. Make sure you wear a well-fitting mask that covers both your mouth and nose when required in public settings. If you are not fully vaccinated, consider wearing a higher level of protection, such as two masks ([double masking](#)) or a respirator (e.g., N95 or KN95) when you are in close contact with other people who may not be fully vaccinated. This is especially important if you are indoors or in a crowded outdoor setting. Until we know more about the Delta variant, it is strongly recommended that fully vaccinated persons also wear masks indoors in public places to help slow the virus spread. Learn more about masks at <https://publichealthsb.org/individual-health/>.
- **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 Santa Barbara County and free to everyone, regardless of immigration status. Many vaccination sites take walk-ins, or you can choose to make an appointment.

- Visit <https://publichealthsb.org/vaccine/> to find a location near you.
- Visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/> for additional locations
- Information is also available in many languages 24/7 by calling 2-1-1.
- TEXT: GETVAX (438829) for English or VACUNA (822862) for Spanish