



# Health Alert Network Message 21-52: New Recommendations for Masking and Testing Due to an Alarming Increase in COVID-19 Cases

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Revision Dates (List All Revision Dates):

## New Recommendations for Masking and Testing Due to an Alarming Increase in COVID-19 Cases

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) is issuing this advisory to notify clinicians of updates to LDH recommendations for masking and SARS-CoV-2 testing. COVID-19 transmission continues to sharply increase throughout Louisiana. The increasing transmission is attributable to the predominant circulation of the highly transmissible Delta (B.1.617.2) SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern, which now accounts for 84% of the circulating lineages in the state. Because of the widespread circulation of the Delta variant, coupled with comparatively low vaccination rates, Louisiana is experiencing alarming increases in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, emergency department visits, and outbreaks:

- The number of new cases diagnosed each day in Louisiana has been increasing since June 16, and the statewide average daily number of cases per 100,000 residents has increased 208% over the past 14 days.
- Statewide percent positivity of new COVID-19 tests conducted is now 8.7%, up from 6.3% last week.
- The number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 throughout Louisiana has been increasing since July 1st, with 749 additional hospitalized patients added during that time. This represents a four-fold from three weeks ago.
- The number of emergency department visits related to COVID-like illness has been significantly increasing throughout the state. Patients presenting with COVID-like illness now account for 8% of emergency department visits, compared to 3% at the beginning of July.
- During the past 2 weeks, 73 new outbreaks and 434 new outbreak-associated cases have been identified. This represents a 204% increase in the number of reported outbreaks and a 184% increase in the number of outbreak-associated cases compared to the previous 2 weeks.

### Masking

In light of uncontrolled COVID-19 transmission throughout Louisiana, and as we learn more about the transmission dynamics of Delta breakthrough cases, **LDH now recommends all people, regardless of vaccination status, mask while indoors if 6 feet of physical distance cannot be maintained.**

## Testing

Early detection of COVID-19 infections remains an important public health priority. The following people should be tested for COVID-19:

- **All people should be tested immediately after a known or suspected exposure to COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status. If negative, they should be tested again between 5-7 days post-exposure.**
- All people who have symptoms of COVID-19 should be tested, **including those who are fully vaccinated.** People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:
  - Fever or chills
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headache
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Sore throat
  - Congestion or runny nose
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Diarrhea

## Vaccination

- COVID-19 vaccines are effective against the delta variant, and though it's still possible to get infected, the vaccines dramatically reduce the risk of serious illness that leads to hospitalization or death.
- COVID-19 vaccination should be highly recommended for all eligible unvaccinated people.