Guidance for individuals who have been vaccinated or had previous infection with COVID-19 when visiting a household setting

Version 1.4 09/09/2021

This guidance is subject to change over time as new evidence becomes available.
Purpose

NPHET requested that HPSC review and update the guidance for individuals who have been vaccinated or had confirmed previous infection with Covid-19 when visiting a household setting in light of relevant emerging evidence.

Background and recommendations

This guidance is for individuals who have been vaccinated or had confirmed previous infection with Covid-19 during the previous nine months and who are visiting a household setting. This guidance does not apply to vaccinated/previously infected individuals visiting a healthcare setting, workplace or residential care facility.

Vaccinated individuals are those who have received a vaccine that has been approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and are:

- 7 days after receipt of the second Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty®) COVID-19 vaccine
- 14 days after receipt of the second Moderna (Moderna®) COVID-19 vaccine
- 14 days after receipt of the Janssen (Janssen®) COVID-19 vaccine (one dose vaccination course)
- 15 days after receipt of the second AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria® or Covishield) COVID-19 vaccine

This guidance may change over time. Although the doses recommended above for each specific vaccine provide significant vaccine protection it remains essential that all individuals receive the recommended full course of vaccination, as per the vaccination schedule.

This guidance has been informed by:

- ECDC Technical Report “Risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission from newly infected individuals with documented previous infection or vaccination”
- CDC Science Brief “Background Rationale and Evidence for Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People” and CDC “Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People”
Summary of evidence

There is evidence that vaccines are highly effective in protecting individuals against symptomatic infection and severe disease. At this time, however, there is a lack of robust evidence on transmission of COVID-19 from vaccinated individuals to unvaccinated individuals. The ECDC Report provides a summary of the available scientific evidence on the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to susceptible contacts from infected individuals with documented previous infection or vaccination. It is intended to support countries in producing their own guidance. ECDC notes however that the evidence was generated before variants of concern started circulating widely and therefore conclusions may be revised as more data becomes available in the future. The CDC scientific brief details a growing body of evidence which suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and potentially less likely to transmit SARS-CoV-2 to others. CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people can visit with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing. For further summary information on these reports, see Appendix A.

A HIQA review recently published ‘Duration of protected immunity (protection from reinfection) following SARS-CoV-2 infection’, published June 3rd 2021, found that people who were tested and confirmed COVID-19 in the past are likely to be protected against reinfection for up to nine months [3].

The evidence suggests that the risks are likely to be low for persons visiting each other in a household setting if persons are fully protected either by vaccination or have had COVID-19 infection confirmed in the previous nine months.
Recommendations

Persons who are:

a. 7 days after receipt of the second Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty®) dose (two dose vaccination course)

b. 14 days after receipt of the second Moderna (Moderna®) dose (two dose vaccination course)

c. 14 days after receipt of the Janssen (Janssen®) dose (one dose vaccination course)

d. 15 days after receipt of the second AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria® or Covishield) dose (two dose vaccination course)

OR

Have had confirmed COVID-19 infection in the previous nine months

AND

who are asymptomatic¹

1. can visit other asymptomatic people who are also fully protected either by vaccination (i.e., they meet the above vaccination criteria) or have had COVID-19 infection in the previous nine months in a household setting, without wearing face coverings or practicing physical distancing,

2. can meet indoors with unvaccinated asymptomatic people from a single household, without wearing face coverings or practicing physical distancing, provided there are no persons who are at high risk or very high risk of severe illness

These recommendations do not apply if any of the vaccinated asymptomatic people have travelled internationally within the previous 14 days, or if they have had contact with a person under investigation for a variant of concern (VOC) or a person who has been confirmed to be infected with a VOC. In these circumstances, visiting is not permitted.

• If a vaccinated person has any symptoms of COVID-19 they must not visit others, including vaccinated people. They must self-isolate and seek medical assessment and testing for COVID-19.

¹ Asymptomatic = no symptoms consistent with COVID-19. See here for list of symptoms.
- Vaccinated people should continue to take precautions in all other settings, such as hand hygiene, physical distancing and wearing a well-fitted mask where indicated.

Appendix A

ECDC Report

Transmission

The available evidence of COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness against transmission of SARS-CoV-2 is still limited. As per the ECDC Technical Report, only one study was identified that directly investigated and reported on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccine against transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to susceptible contacts from vaccinated cases [1]. Findings from this study were “consistent with a substantial reduction in transmission risk from fully-vaccinated individuals to susceptible contacts”.

Ongoing and upcoming studies should add further evidence regarding transmission between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals in the coming months. There are ongoing healthcare workers’ household studies in the UK. Household studies are also planned in Israel, involving close family contacts of vaccinated individuals.

Infection in vaccinated individuals

COVID-19 vaccines do not confer sterilising immunity to all individuals. Hence, vaccinated individuals might still be able to transmit SARS-CoV-2 infection to susceptible contacts.

There is evidence that vaccination significantly reduces infection in vaccinated individuals. A limited number of vaccine studies with prospective follow-up show reduced viral load and duration of virus shedding among vaccine recipients compared to placebo groups. Viral load is thought to be a leading indicator of SARS-CoV-2 transmission [2]. It is not currently known if these observed reductions in viral load and duration of shedding actually reduce transmission.

However, the ECDC report acknowledges the limitations below:

- The review was based on emerging evidence, much of it from the pre-print, non-peer reviewed literature.
- Vaccines have only been developed and tested very recently. Hence, there is limited data available regarding transmission.
- The situation concerning VOCs is evolving rapidly. Much of the evidence collected and presented here was generated before the variants started circulating widely and therefore conclusions may be revised as more data becomes available in the future.
CDC Science Brief

The CDC has produced guidance for fully vaccinated people based on their Science Brief. This guidance makes three recommendations for fully vaccinated people in non-healthcare settings.

Fully vaccinated people can:

- visit with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing
- visit with unvaccinated people from a single household who are at low risk for severe COVID-19 disease indoors, without wearing masks or physical distancing
- refrain from quarantine and testing following a known exposure if asymptomatic.

The CDC notes that “the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in fully vaccinated people cannot be completely eliminated in the setting of continued widespread community transmission of the virus. Vaccinated people could potentially still become infected and spread the virus to others. However, the benefits of avoiding disruptions such as unnecessary quarantine and social isolation may outweigh these potential residual risks. A balanced approach to phasing out certain prevention measures may be a powerful motivator for vaccination, and thus should be an important goal of the U.S. vaccination program.”

References:

