

September 22, 2022

## Is the pandemic over?

The U.S. is still recording hundreds of COVID-19 deaths per day.

### Communication support

As winter approaches and new variants develop, it's plausible that the country will experience another surge in the coming months. This week's newsletter covers where we stand in the fight against COVID-19 and what to expect in the near future. —PGP Response Team

### Talking points

President Joe Biden said in a *60 Minutes* interview on Sunday that “the pandemic is over.” A majority of the country now has some level of immune protection against the virus. But COVID-19 remains a risk to many and is causing hundreds of deaths every day in the U.S. The talking points below detail the current state of the pandemic and how we should respond in the coming months.

#### The U.S. continues to see hundreds of COVID-19 deaths per day.

- Many individuals and organizations in the U.S. are operating as if the pandemic is nearing an end.
- But the virus is still killing [an average of about 400 people per day](#).
- The virus remains a risk, especially for the elderly, the immunocompromised, and people who are not up to date on their vaccinations.
- COVID-19 and its potentially long-lasting symptoms are unpredictable, and we don't know what this winter has in store.

#### New variants could drive a winter surge.

- Omicron subvariant BA.5 continues to be dominant in the U.S., but BA.4.6 is starting to gain a foothold.
- Internationally, new variants [BJ.1](#), [BA.2.3](#), and [BA.2.75.2](#) are all gaining attention, and each of them has mutations that could allow for

- significant immune escape.
- One of these new variants could cause a winter wave, but there is not enough data yet to make any clear predictions.

### **We have the tools to stay protected this winter: COVID-19 boosters, masks, regular testing, and treatment options.**

- Despite the continued risks, we are in a different stage of the pandemic thanks to key tools that we can use to lower our risk.
- Getting an updated COVID-19 booster is crucial to staying protected. The updated COVID-19 boosters are bivalent vaccines that include components from both the original COVID-19 virus and the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants.
- Precautions like wearing masks and testing regularly are still important, especially as there are fewer mandated COVID-19 prevention measures.
- Wear high-quality, well-fitting masks in indoor public spaces and if community transmission is rising in your area.
- [Test regularly and at least two times 48 hours apart](#) to avoid getting a false negative, particularly if you have symptoms, have been exposed, or are planning to travel or attend a gathering.
- Be prepared for [the chance that you do get infected](#) and know your [options for treatment](#).

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### **Frequently asked questions**

1. Is COVID-19 like the flu yet?
2. What should we expect in the coming months?
3. What can you do to stay safe?

[Download the talking points and FAQs](#)

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### **Trending misinformation**

**Controversial scientist continues to promote hydroxychloroquine for COVID-19**

Several large social media accounts are sharing a video clip of an epidemiologist claiming that the “biggest lie” is that hydroxychloroquine isn’t a safe, lifesaving treatment for COVID-19. One post sharing the clip accuses the U.S. government of colluding with pharmaceutical companies to discredit hydroxychloroquine and promote vaccines.

**Counter-messaging:** Multiple large studies, including a randomized controlled clinical trial, have shown that hydroxychloroquine has no beneficial effect on COVID-19 patients. The fact that a drug is a safe, effective treatment for some conditions does not mean it is effective against COVID-19 as well. The epidemiologist in the clip has baselessly promoted hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 treatment for over two years, including in a 2020 op-ed that was disavowed by members of the publication’s editorial board. He has also repeatedly circulated misinformation about the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.

### **Article misrepresents study to falsely claim COVID-19 vaccines impair immunity**

A far-right site published an article falsely claiming that a new study shows that vaccinated people are more likely than unvaccinated people to get COVID-19 and that vaccines “destroy” immunity from previous COVID-19 infection. The posts have been widely circulated on social media.

**Counter-messaging:** The researchers say that the posts misrepresent their study’s findings. The study, which evaluated COVID-19 outcomes in children ages 5 to 11, found that vaccines boosted immunity from infection. Immunity against COVID-19, whether from vaccination or infection, decreased over time in children, but the combination of vaccination and previous infection provided the strongest protection.

### **Nonsensical claim circulates that vaccines are “98 times” more harmful than COVID-19**

The meaningless claim that COVID-19 vaccines are 98 times more harmful than COVID-19 is being circulated by right-wing blogs and social media accounts. The claim is based not on a scientific study but on a non-peer-reviewed risk-benefit analysis of COVID-19 boosters for university students.

**Counter-messaging:** The analysis claims that COVID-19 boosters for young adults are unethical because the boosters could potentially cause harm to individual young adults. There is no scientific evidence to support the conclusions of the analysis or the claim that serious adverse events from vaccination are more frequent than serious complications from COVID-19 infection. Posts about the analysis have also misrepresented the study to suggest that it refers to all COVID-19 vaccines instead of boosters.

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## Resources

**Your Local Epidemiologist:** [State of Affairs \(Sept 19\): COVID19, MPX, Polio, and... Flu](#)

**Our World In Data:** [Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths](#)

**Biobot Analytics:** [The Biobot Network of Wastewater Treatment Plants](#)

## News coverage

**NPR:** [Joe Biden says the COVID-19 pandemic is over. This is what the data tells us](#)

**Public Good News:** [Why we need updated boosters for the fall](#)

**Public Good News:** [How to effectively use at-home rapid tests this fall](#)