

CDC issues relaxed guidelines for gatherings of fully vaccinated people

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9 March 2021

On March 8, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published its interim public health recommendations for fully vaccinated people. A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or two weeks after a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which has recently received emergency authorization for use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The guidelines outline certain privileges now allowed to fully vaccinated individuals, such as visiting with other people who are fully vaccinated indoors without wearing masks or physically distancing from them. They can also see other people in a single unvaccinated household, with the caveat that no one in that household is at high-risk for severe COVID-19 disease. If they remain asymptomatic, fully vaccinated individuals do not have to quarantine or be tested if they were exposed to the virus.

Amid a global pandemic with less than 10 percent of the population having been fully vaccinated thus far, and while virulent strains are becoming dominant, these relaxations are quite extraordinary and possibly dangerous. The CDC is attempting to temper these guidelines with a semblance of cautionary recommendations, asking individuals who have been fully vaccinated to continue to wear masks in public, physically distance and avoid large gatherings. The guidelines stipulate that if someone develops COVID-19 symptoms, they should get tested.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, at a press briefing introducing the new guidelines, told reporters, “Our guidance must balance the risk to people who have been fully vaccinated, the risks to those who have not yet received the vaccine, and the impact in the larger community transmission of COVID-19.”

The carefully crafted and well-timed statement is politically loaded to offer a weary and dispirited population the illusion that normalcy is on the horizon. Dr. Walensky went on to add, “We believe these new recommendations are an important first step in our efforts to resuming everyday activities in our communities,” making reference

to grandparents finally being able to visit their children and families.

President Joe Biden has been touting that there will be enough vaccine supplies for every American by the end of May, but not necessarily that everyone would be vaccinated by that time. Presently, about 60 million people have received at least one dose of a vaccine, and 30 million have been fully vaccinated.

After a blistering winter peak that had seen daily deaths reach more than 3,000 a day, the media has been repeatedly highlighting the decline in cases and deaths as if the pandemic had exited stage left. Despite the federal government’s toothless warnings against loosening restrictions, state after state, whether under Republican and Democratic administrations, is lifting restrictions on businesses and gatherings, and also lifting mask mandates.

What is lacking in the CDC’s guidelines is a thorough scientific assessment of their implications. Just a week ago, Dr. Walensky warned, “Please hear me clearly. At this level of cases with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained. These variants are a very real threat to our people and to our progress. Now is not the time to relax the critical safeguards that we know could stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, not when we are so close.”

Accepting this concerning premise, these guidelines, in a real-world sense, will only encourage the loosening of restrictions, as people who have been falsely assured let their guard down and re-congregate. More than likely, the very real fatigue within the population—a product of criminal neglect that has produced social murder on an unprecedented scale—will make itself felt immediately, as the longing for social contact makes people heedless of the continued danger of the coronavirus.

As Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted succinctly in yesterday’s World Health Organization’s (WHO) COVID press briefing, “We have come so far. We have suffered so much. And we have lost so many. We cannot, we must not squander the progress we have made.

We have the tools to control the pandemic. But we can only do it if we use them consistently and equitably ... there are no shortcuts.”

Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, summarized the concerns raised by public health officials, adding, “The arrival of vaccines is a great hope. But it is, potentially, a moment when we lose concentration. If I think I am going to get a vaccine maybe in the next few weeks or the next six weeks or the next two months maybe I am not so careful anymore. Maybe I think I’m through this, right? You don’t need a lot of people to start thinking like that [to] give the virus the opportunity to spread. We saw that in Europe, we saw that coming into the Christmas period. Small changes in the behavior of a large number of people can lead to huge changes in the epidemiology of this virus. I think we need to have learned that by now.”

What the interim vaccine trials have proven is that the vaccines are efficacious in preventing severe disease and hospitalization. They have not verified that they can prevent infections. Precisely because of the possibility that vaccinated individuals can be infective, public health officials have consistently warned about the need for continued adherence to the public health measures that have repeatedly proven that they work very well when implemented consistently and consciously.

Moreover, the number of participants in these trials and outcomes between those receiving the vaccine or placebo were by all measures quite minuscule compared to the populations of even the smallest countries. It is more important to measure the effectiveness of a vaccine by how it performs in the real world. In a recent Scottish trial studying the effectiveness of Pfizer and AstraZeneca’s vaccines, the researchers conducted a study comparing the hospitalization rates between vaccinated and unvaccinated groups.

Out of a population of 5.4 million people, more than 1.1 million had received at least one dose of either vaccine. The trial results demonstrated an 85 percent reduction for the Pfizer vaccine and a 94 percent reduction for the AstraZeneca vaccine. Those over 80 years of age had a comparable outcome at 81 percent.

Still, vaccinated people ended up in the hospital with COVID-19 complications, implying they were infected and therefore also infective. Regarding the CDC guidelines for fully vaccinated people, this has significant implications. What remains unknown is how infective, and what percentage of vaccinated people will potentially be asymptomatic carriers and, ironically, contribute to extending the pandemic precisely because they have been vaccinated and are as a result less careful?

Detlef Trefzger, chief executive of Kuehne+Nagel, a logistics giant contracted by governments to distribute vaccines globally, explained that vaccine supplies were hindered not by distribution bottlenecks but by limited manufacturing capacity. “I don’t want to talk about hearsay or the feedback we get, but I would not expect it to be realistic that more than 30 to 50 percent of people [would be] vaccinated in the Western world before summer next year.”

More importantly, the variants presently surfacing throughout the United States have been rapidly mutating, becoming more virulent under pressures placed on the virus through mass surges and rapidly growing immunity within the population. Conducting a vaccination campaign while simultaneously supporting a policy of herd immunity can only spur more mutations. Even the WHO has recently acknowledged that a percentage of the infections in Manaus, Brazil in December were due to reinfections.

Many wealthy and privileged individuals have used their influence to jump the line to receive these lifesaving vaccines. R. Couri Hay, a New York City society publicist, told the *Insider*, “The rich don’t want to wait their turn, so they’re able to pull strings just like they would get a first-class ticket on an airline by spending the top dollar or getting the best hotel room. The rich view the vaccine and the testing as another commodity that they could purchase.”

The WHO’s Dr. Ryan, speaking at a media conference in Geneva, said the organization didn’t recommend vaccination certificates. “Quite simply, vaccination is just not available enough around the world and is not available certainly on an equitable basis,” he said.

The fog of pandemic must not lull the working class into a state of complacency. The misery and isolation that have befallen so many is a byproduct of a deliberate policy that has subordinated their well-being to Wall Street and the financial oligarchs’ insatiable appetite for profits. Government advisories on the relaxation of restrictions should be regarded with suspicion.



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