What do the CDC’s new COVID-19 Community Levels mean for me?
Words to Know in this Fact Sheet
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC is a part of the government. They tell people what to do to stay safe from COVID-19.

Community transmission

How many cases of COVID-19 there are in a place.
COVID-19 Community Levels

A way of measuring COVID-19 risk in a place. The CDC decides a county’s COVID-19 Community Level based on how many COVID-19 cases there are in the county and whether the hospitals in the county are crowded with sick people who have COVID-19.

Ventilator

A machine that helps you breathe
What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a bad disease.

It makes people very sick.

COVID-19 has spread around the world.

COVID-19 is still spreading.

You can learn more about COVID-19 by reading our fact sheet on the COVID-19 vaccine.
Why do hospitals fill up during COVID-19?

If you get very sick with COVID-19, you should go to the hospital.

Hospitals can run out of space.

If many people have COVID-19, the hospital can get full.

Then, there is no space for more people with COVID-19.
There is no space for people who are sick with something else.

This is a problem!
Some people with COVID-19 need a ventilator.

A **ventilator** is a machine that helps you breathe.

Hospitals can run out of ventilators.

Then, they can’t help any more people who need ventilators.

When hospitals fill up because of COVID-19, people don’t get the help they need.
What is community transmission?

The **CDC** is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC is a part of the government.

They tell people what to do to stay safe from COVID-19.

The CDC measures **community transmission** of COVID-19.
Community transmission means how many cases of COVID-19 there are in a place.

If community transmission is high in your area, that means you have a high risk of catching COVID-19.

The CDC says that community transmission is high when 1 or more out of every thousand people in a place has COVID-19.

1 out of every thousand people might not sound like a lot.
But remember, COVID-19 spreads very fast.

If one out of every thousand people in a place has a bad disease like COVID-19, that is bad news.
What are COVID-19 Community Levels?

The CDC used to talk about how many COVID-19 cases a place had.

They used those numbers to tell people how to stay safe.
For example

Let’s say a place had a lot of COVID-19 cases.

The CDC used to say that people in that place should wear masks inside.

In February 2022, the CDC started using a new way to talk about risk from COVID-19.

They made a new tool called **COVID-19 Community Levels**.
Your COVID-19 Community Level can be:

- Low.
- Medium.
- High.
The CDC decides each county’s COVID-19 Community Level based on:

- How many COVID-19 cases there are in the county
- Whether the hospitals in the county are crowded with sick people who have COVID-19.
In the COVID-19 Community Levels tool, a county can have up to 2 COVID-19 cases out of every thousand people and still be “Low.”

This is different from the risk of getting COVID-19.

If a place has 1 or more COVID-19 cases out of every thousand people, the risk of getting COVID-19 is high.
A low COVID-19 Community Level means that:

• Less than 2 out of every thousand people have COVID-19, AND

• The hospitals in your county are not crowded with people who have COVID-19.
A medium COVID-19 Community Level can mean 2 things.

Medium can mean that:

- Less than 2 out of every thousand people have COVID-19, BUT

- The hospitals in your county are crowded with people who have COVID-19.
OR medium can mean that:

- More than 2 out of every thousand people have COVID-19, BUT

- The hospitals in your county are not crowded with people who have COVID-19.
A high COVID-19 Community Level means that:

- More than 2 out of every thousand people have COVID-19, AND
- The hospitals in your county are crowded with people who have COVID-19.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 2 out of every thousand people have COVID-19</th>
<th>Hospitals are not crowded</th>
<th>Hospitals are crowded</th>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 2 out of every thousand people have COVID-19</td>
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COVID-19 Community Levels are mostly about whether or not hospitals are crowded.

The CDC uses COVID-19 Community Levels to tell people what they should do.

For example:

The CDC says to wear a mask inside if your county’s COVID-19 Community Level is high.
If my county’s Community Level is low or medium, am I safe from COVID-19?

Your county’s COVID-19 Community Level does not tell you much about your risk of catching COVID-19.

Even in places with low COVID-19 Community Levels, people still get sick with COVID-19.

You can still catch COVID-19 even if your county’s COVID-19 Community Level is low or medium.
Remember, “high” and “low” mean different things for your risk of getting COVID-19 than for COVID-19 Community Levels.

A place can have a low COVID-19 Community Level, but a high risk of catching COVID-19.
For example:

- Normaltown has a lot of hospital beds.
- Many people in Normaltown have COVID-19.
- 1 out of every thousand people in Normaltown has COVID-19.
- If you are in Normaltown, your risk of getting COVID-19 is high.
Hospitals in Normaltown are not crowded.

So Normaltown’s Community Level is low.

But there are still a lot of people with COVID-19!
Some places have a lot of hospital beds, but also have a lot of people sick with COVID-19.

The CDC used to talk about how places like that have a high risk of COVID-19.

Now, the CDC says that places like that have low COVID-19 Community Levels.

The number of people with COVID-19 did not change.
The risk did not change.

The CDC just changed how they talk about those places.
Changing how we talk about COVID-19 does not make things safer.

COVID-19 is still spreading.

People are still getting COVID-19.

People are still going to the hospital.

People are still dying from COVID-19.
When should I wear a mask?

You still should wear a mask if you can.

We have to wear masks *before* the hospitals get full.

Then, we can stop COVID-19 from spreading.

If we stop COVID-19 from spreading, hospitals won’t fill up.
If we start wearing masks after the hospitals are full, that doesn’t help as much.

So you should still wear a mask if you can.

You should wear a mask when you’re in public places, like a grocery store or bank.

You should wear a mask on planes, buses or trains.
Wearing a mask keeps you safer from COVID-19.

You can learn more about masks by reading our fact sheet on masks.
What else should I do to stay safe?

If you have not had your COVID-19 vaccines, you should get vaccinated.

You can ask your doctor about getting vaccinated.

You can also go to vaccines.gov.

That is a website that will help you find a place to get vaccinated.
If you have not had your COVID-19 booster, you should get the booster.

Learn more about boosters in our factsheet on boosters.
And you should also continue doing the things you were doing before:

- Keep wearing a mask.
- Keep staying home if you can.
- Keep washing your hands.
To Learn More
