

September 15, 2021

Indiana and the rest of the nation is experiencing an upsurge in COVID-19 cases. Yesterday, there were over 3500 cases in Indiana with the Delta variant being the dominant strain. The Delta variant is much more contagious than previous variants and now accounts for 95% of cases in the United States. Each individual with the Delta variant can infect up to 8 or 9 individuals, compared with the original version of the virus which infects approximately 2 or 3 individuals. The Delta variant is also found to cause more severe illness than previous variants. Due to the increase in cases, the CDC and IDOH have released updated guidance.

What are the guidance changes?

1. **Excursions** - All residents on excursions longer than 24 hours should be considered a readmission for screening purposes. Unvaccinated residents must remain in quarantine for 14 days. All residents regardless of vaccination status will be given a point-of-care test upon return. Excursions over 24 hours should not occur while facility is in outbreak testing.
2. **Unvaccinated Employees** - All unvaccinated employees will be tested in accordance with the county positivity rate. As the county positive rate increases, the frequency of testing for those unvaccinated employees will increase.
3. **Residents with Symptoms** - Any resident who presents with symptoms or possible exposure during screening process for COVID-19 should be placed in Transmission Based Precautions and a PCR test administered according to current guidance documents.
4. **Dining, Fitness and Life Enrichment** - When a resident or employee tests positive and has been in the facility during their potentially infectious period, they will be contact traced and outbreak testing will commence and the community must close dining, fitness and life enrichment until they complete one round of testing. If the first round of testing reveals no additional COVID-19 cases in other areas of the facility, then dining and activities may resume for residents in areas with no COVID-19 cases. If the first round of outbreak testing reveals one or more additional COVID-19 cases in other areas of the facility, then communal dining and activities should be halted in all areas of the facility.

How does the Delta variant affect vaccinated people?

The Department of Health and Human Services states that the available data makes it very clear that protection against COVID-19 begins to decrease over time following the initial doses of vaccination, and in association with the dominance of the Delta variant, we are starting to see evidence of reduced protection against mild and moderate disease. We are waiting on news about receiving the booster (3rd dose) to add protection for our residents and those that have been vaccinated longer than 8 months ago. If you are moderately to severely immunocompromised, last week the CDC recommended that people with specific conditions get an additional dose of Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

While vaccines are still very effective against the variant, breakthrough COVID-19 cases occur in just 0.225% of fully vaccinated individuals. It is very important to note that current vaccines offer excellent protection against serious illness including hospitalization and death from COVID-19 caused by Delta variant.

What is the good news?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 disease, and it will now be marketed as *Comirnaty*. We hope the FDA's approval increases confidence that this vaccine meets the high standards for safety, effectiveness and manufacturing quality the FDA requires of an approved product.

What can you do to help?

1. Continue to practice infection control principles of wearing face masks and practicing hand hygiene, and social distancing.
2. Schedule your vaccination for the protection of yourself and others. It is more important than ever to be vaccinated.
3. Encourage your friends, families and acquaintances to get vaccinated and help them understand how this can affect everyone. The best way to prevent the spread of the Delta variant is to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Receiving all recommended doses is crucial in being protected against COVID-19.

Justus Senior Living communities will continue to update policies and procedures to comply with state and federal guidelines to keep our residents safe and provide you with updates along the way. The state and federal governments have discussed making the vaccine mandatory for senior living and healthcare professionals. Senior living professional organizations support an all-or-nothing approach requiring all healthcare workers in order to alleviate the staffing challenges that would occur with a senior living-only mandate.

As always, it is a privilege and honor to serve our residents.

With gratitude,

Justus Leadership