

Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer

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Dear Howard County Community,

On May 27, 2022 Howard County was designated as a community with a high level of COVID by the CDC. COVID-19 Community Levels are categorized as low, medium, and high based on the number of COVID-19 cases in a given community and the impact of severe disease on community-based healthcare systems. The rise in cases is due to the subvariant BA.2.12.1. This subvariant is more transmissible than previous variants but fortunately not more severe. With increasing number of cases, hospitalizations are rising. Hospitalizations are expected to continue to rise and perhaps an increase in deaths as these two indicators lag case rates. Therefore, the CDC recommends the following COVID-19 layered prevention strategies to limit severe disease and reduce the potential for strain on the healthcare system. When the community level is high the following strategies are recommended:

- Wear a well-fitting mask indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status (including in K-12 schools and other indoor community settings)
- If you are immunocompromised or [high risk](#) for severe disease
 - Wear a [mask or respirator](#) that provides you with greater protection
 - Consider avoiding non-essential indoor activities in public where you could be exposed
 - Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions (e.g., testing)
 - Have a plan for rapid testing if needed (e.g., having home tests or access to testing)
 - Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you are a candidate for treatments like oral antivirals, PrEP, and monoclonal antibodies
- If you have household or social contact with someone at [high risk](#) for severe disease
 - consider self-testing to detect infection before contact
 - consider wearing a mask when indoors with them
- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and boosters.

More tools than ever before are available to prevent COVID-19 from placing strain on our community and healthcare system. Have a plan in case you or a family member become sick or get exposed.

- Keep some rapid antigen kits at home and staying aware of available [Howard County COVID-19 Testing Sites](#).
- Stay home if symptomatic and get tested with PCR or a rapid antigen test. If using a rapid antigen test and you test negative but are still symptomatic, repeat with another rapid antigen or PCR test.
- Test if exposed to someone with COVID-19 according to the [CDC COVID-19 Testing Guidelines](#).
- Quarantine after exposure to someone with COVID-19, if not up to date on vaccination.
- Isolate if positive or symptomatic (without another diagnosis or negative test).
- Follow [CDC Isolation and Quarantine Recommendations](#) for the duration of isolation and quarantine and wear a mask around others for 10 days.

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- Contact your medical provider or go to <https://covid-19-test-to-treat-locator-dhhs.hub.arcgis.com/> regarding potential treatment if you test positive.
- Visit the [Howard County Vaccine Locator](#) to stay up to date with vaccines and boosters to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Recent data indicates new cases have plateaued and appear to be declining. Hopefully, this trend continues, and these mitigation strategies can be relaxed as our community level of disease improves.

Thank you for your support and continued commitment to health.



Maura J. Rossman, MD