

“Can we hug yet?”

Yes, if you are fully vaccinated!

As of the end of March, 2.5 million Americans are getting vaccinated each day and age limits for eligibility continue to drop. Hope is on the horizon!

If your loved one is two weeks past their final shot then they are fully vaccinated. That means the second shot for Pfizer and Moderna, or the single shot for Johnson & Johnson.

It's a different world in many ways:

Gathering indoors

- People nearby whom your loved one *knows* are vaccinated can now visit together indoors. No need for masks or social distancing. Have a few friends over and celebrate!
- One household of unvaccinated people can even visit with those in a vaccinated household. No precautions needed. Hug those grandchildren!
- *The only exception concerns people at high risk and their housemates.* If an unvaccinated person is over age 85, overweight, diabetic, or a smoker and/or has a heart, lung, or kidney disorder or cancer, then everyone at the gathering should observe the usual precautions: Masks, social distancing, washing hands, and meeting in well-ventilated spaces. This applies even if the high-risk individual is not visiting, but someone in their household is.

Gathering outside the home, continue with precautions

In a crowd, one never knows for sure who is and isn't vaccinated. For the protection of all of us, everyone needs to follow precautions in public, including the fully vaccinated.

- It is best to avoid medium and large gatherings, indoors or out. That includes trains, planes, and public transport.

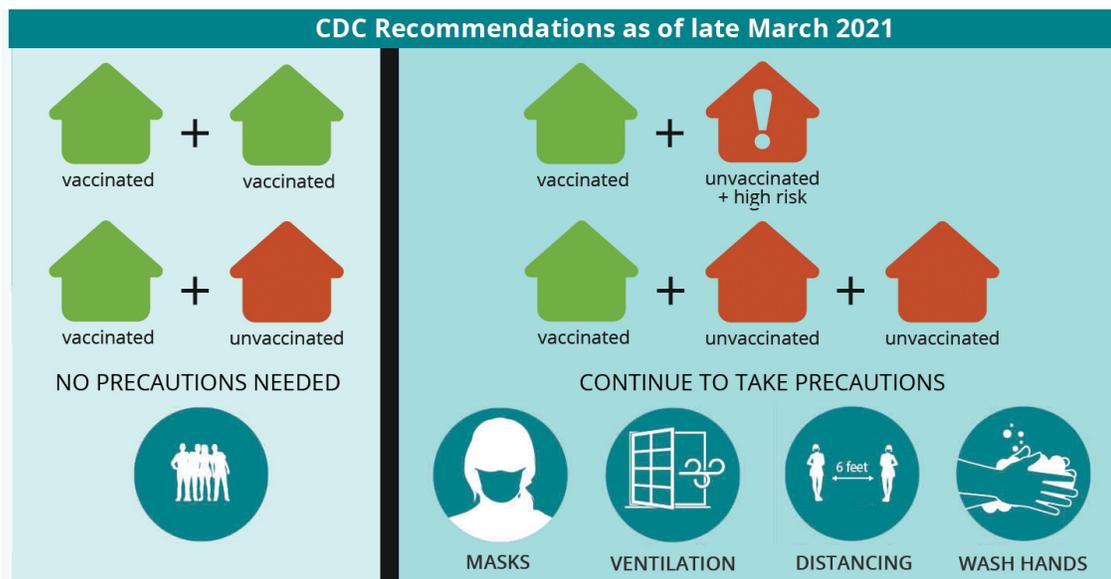


"Over the moon! That's how my wife and I felt when we got the vaccine and could finally see our grandkids. What a joy!"

800-771-2153

Easterseals-Goodwill Clinical Services supports older adults and their families in Butte, Great Falls and neighboring communities.

Give us a call at 800-771-2153 to find out how we can support you.



Caring after the hospital



Hooray! Your loved one has been discharged from the hospital. While extreme cause for concern may be over, recovery from COVID and its intensive treatment simply will take time.

Here are things you can do to help:

Physical concerns

- **Trouble breathing.** Use the breathing exercise devices given to you by the hospital. You can also ask for home visits from a physical therapist or occupational therapist.
- **Circulatory problems.** So much time in bed is not good for the heart and body. Encourage your loved one to get up and walk around as much as possible.
- **Weakness.** Time in the hospital saps stamina. Pace tasks so there are rest periods in between. A cane or walker may help your relative get around without becoming too tired.
- **Fatigue.** To get a good night's sleep, support your loved one to go to bed at the same time each night, limit caffeine, and avoid naps after 3:00 pm.

Mental and emotional concerns. Many people who were hospitalized experience PTSD symptoms much like soldiers returning from war.

- **Depression.** Sadness, certainly, but also disinterest in activities that used to be fun. Feelings of guilt or worthlessness may arise. Also, irritability.
- **Anxiety.** Worry, restlessness, and difficulty sleeping.
- **"Brain fog."** From short-term memory problems to difficulty concentrating or making decisions. Sometimes familiar tasks feel challenging, like following a recipe or paying the bills.
- **Nightmares.** Especially common among those who were in the ICU (Intensive Care Unit).

If your relative has these symptoms, talk with the doctor. There are medications and counseling services to help your loved one return to a healthy state.

Anniversaries can be painful

For every individual who was lost to COVID, there are on average nine survivors. As a nation, that means close to 5 million Americans will be coming up on the anniversary of a loved one's passing this year.

Many families were not able to be at the bedside when their relative died. Hospitals couldn't allow visitors. Travel was restricted. The result has been crushing feelings of guilt, even though their absence couldn't be helped.

Funerals have been kept to a minimum. Grief has been processed in isolation, without the hugs and community gathering that ease the pain of a loved one's death.

If you are coming up on such an anniversary, be aware that you may have strong feelings arise, even mental and physical reactions. It's not unusual to experience

- sadness, anger, and anxiety
- confused thinking
- trouble with sleep (too much or too little)

You may find yourself reliving the events leading up to your loved one's illness and death. And you may find yourself drawn to alcohol or other substances to ease the distress.

Children may also have problems at the anniversary. Some withdraw. Others may become aggressive or act out.

Everyone—adults and children alike—should expect that there may be a dip in "normal functioning" around the time of the anniversary. It's wise to be prepared for a slowdown and allow the mind, body, and spirit to process the loss.

If you have a friend struggling with an anniversary, the best thing you can do is listen. Let them share memories of their loved one. Talking helps. Grief has no timetable. There's no such thing as "getting over it." Only getting used to it.

These are tender times. Be gentle with yourself. If grief seems to get in the way of normal functioning for two weeks or more, then it may be wise to talk with a grief counselor.

Contact us at 800-771-2153

