

MDS Alert

Reader Question: Don't Ease Up On COVID-19 Restrictions

Question: Most of the residents in my facility, and at least half the staff, are fully vaccinated. Can I stop wearing a mask all day every day in my personal office?

Tennessee Subscriber

Answer: While wearing a mask is, ultimately, a personal choice, the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19 infections, is mutating, and the current vaccines do not necessarily protect against the resulting variants.

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released a study detailing how a single unvaccinated staff member caused an outbreak of 46 cases (between residents and staff) of COVID-19 in a Kentucky skilled nursing facility. Of this 46, 18 residents and four staff members were considered "fully vaccinated," in that they had received their second doses of one of the mRNA-technology vaccines more than two weeks before the outbreak began - and thus they were not fully protected. Of the 26 residents who got COVID-19, three ultimately died, including one person who was vaccinated.



"... unvaccinated residents and health care personnel (HCP) had 3.0 and 4.1 times the risk of infection as did vaccinated residents and HCP. Vaccine was 86.5% protective against symptomatic illness among residents and 87.1% protective among HCP," say **Alyson M. Cavanaugh, DPT, PhD**, et. al. in the study, "COVID-19 Outbreak Associated with a SARS-CoV-2 R.1 Lineage Variant in a Skilled Nursing Facility After Vaccination Program - Kentucky, March 2021," published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR).

Bottom line: Even if you're vaccinated, you are not necessarily safe yet, while the virus is mutating so prolifically. The CDC advises everyone to continue wearing a mask. See www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html for more details.