

INFECTIOUS DISEASE AND INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL COVID-19 COMMITTEE

Bulletin #134b – COVID-19 – ID-IPC – Why We Wear Masks When Vaccinated – Apr 9 2021

**COVID-19 Patient Care and Infection Prevention & Control (IPC) Measures:
Top 4 reasons we still need to wear masks even if vaccinated**

So, are you sick of wearing masks yet? Masks have played a critical role both in preventing transmission (source control) and getting infected with COVID-19. Nonetheless, all the personal measures we take every day to protect ourselves and others has a cost.

For now, this cost will be well worth it. Here are the Top 4 reasons New Brunswickers must still wear a mask.

1. It will take months before the majority of the population will get vaccinated.

Currently, less than 15 % of New Brunswickers over the age of 16 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. It will be several months from now before the majority of adults will have received two vaccine doses, and this will not occur for the population under 16 until sometime in 2022. We also do not yet know what proportion of the total population requires vaccination in order to obtain herd immunity. Until we reach herd immunity, we still need to wear masks.

2. Vaccines are not 100 % effective.

All of the vaccines approved in Canada for COVID-19 have very high levels of protection. These vaccines reduce the risk of symptomatic infection by approximately 70 to 95 % and early evidence indicates they reduce asymptomatic infection by a similar margin. This means that some vaccinated New Brunswickers will get infected. Because vaccines are not 100 % effective, we still need to wear masks.

3. We do not know the duration of vaccine protection.

So far, we know that vaccine protection is good for at least four months. These vaccines are brand new, so it will be a year from now before we know if they are protective for one year, and two years from now to know if they are protective for two years. In the meantime, we still need to wear masks.

4. **People can become reinfected.**

There is now good evidence to show that people previously infected with earlier strains of COVID-19 can be reinfected with new variants. It is therefore possible that we could see new variants causing infection in vaccinated persons. Until we know the answer to this question, we still need to wear masks.

Yes, we are all tired of wearing masks, but for now, we need to continue to wear a mask, maintain two metres (six feet) of physical distancing, limit our social networks, avoid large crowds, practice cough etiquette and use frequent hand hygiene.

These measures are so effective, New Brunswick has not had a single influenza transmission this winter.

There is a good chance we will be able to diminish these measures over time, but for now we should continue these safety practices.

On a positive note, this pandemic has reinforced how important it is to practice good hand hygiene at all times and stay home if you have respiratory symptoms. These two habits should never disappear.