



There have been many twists and turns in the COVID-19 journey since it was first reported in the closing months of 2019. The appearance of multiple strains of the virus that causes COVID-19 has further complicated matters. Many countries have seen a spike in cases driven by the COVID-19 Delta variant, a highly contagious version of the original virus that is making many people (primarily those who have not received a COVID-19 vaccine) very unwell.

At HealthX Africa, we are here to answer your questions about the Delta variant and what you can do to keep yourself and your family safe and healthy.

What is the Delta Variant?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is called Sars-CoV-2. It is a new version from a family of viruses called Coronaviruses, which cause ailments such as the common cold. There are many variants of COVID-19, but not all of them are clinically important because they may not make you any sicker or be more transmissible. Delta is one of several variants of COVID-19 with clinical significance.



How did the Delta variant come about?

It is normal for viruses to mutate. Viruses that contain genetic material called mRNA, such as coronaviruses and influenza viruses, are especially good at evading our immune defences by mutating. Delta is just one of many mutations or variations of the original COVID-19 virus.

Is the Delta variant more significant than the other COVID-19 strains right now?

Delta appears to be more than twice as contagious as the other strains, and spreads more rapidly than other known COVID-19 variants. It is more virulent, which means it is more contagious and better at evading our body's own immunity. Therefore, if one is infected with this variant (particularly those who are unvaccinated), one is more likely to be hospitalized with severe illness compared to the other strains.

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Who is most at risk of contracting the variant?

Just as with the other variants of this virus, the most vulnerable to contract the Delta variant are unvaccinated people. The variant spreads much slower in populations with more fully vaccinated people.

What is the best way to protect myself and my family from the Delta variant?

There are three main ways (4) to protect yourself and your family from the Delta variant of COVID-19:

1 Get vaccinated

If you are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, please consider getting fully vaccinated. The best vaccine is the one that is available, do not wait for a different vaccine. Getting vaccinated protects you, those around you, and those who are vulnerable to the disease but unable to be vaccinated.

2 Physical distancing and practice good hygiene

Avoid large gatherings to limit the risk of contracting any of the variants of the virus that causes COVID-19.

3 Mask Up

Wear a face covering when indoors and in proximity to others, even if you are fully vaccinated. Studies show that surgical masks are more effective than cloth masks.

Are different COVID-19 vaccines effective against the Delta variant?

Yes, they are. These vaccines significantly reduce the risk of hospitalization or developing the severe form of COVID-19, whether caused by the Delta variant or any other variant. In addition, all the approved vaccines lower your chance of spreading the virus if you happen to get COVID-19.

Are the symptoms of the Delta variant different?

The symptoms of the Delta variant are the same as those of the original COVID-19 virus. Symptoms often begin about 4 to 5 days after a person is infected with the virus, although it can take as long as 14 days for symptoms to appear for some people, and others may never show symptoms at all.

A pulse oximeter can help you detect COVID-19 at home even in the absence of these symptoms. If you own a pulse oximeter, be on the look out for low oxygen saturations (below 92-94% when breathing normally) (1).

Symptoms (2) can include any or all the following:

- Cough
- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Fatigue
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Difficulty swallowing
- Loss smell or taste
- Loose motions
- Unexplained skin rash



Infection with the Delta variant has a higher risk of progression to more severe symptoms and hospitalization.

Like the original COVID-19 virus, the severity of illness is also influenced by other factors such as age and pre-existing medical conditions.

Are children at risk from the Delta variant?

Yes. Like other variants of COVID-19, the Delta variant can be contracted by children. With other variants of COVID-19, symptoms seemed milder in young children than in adults, but the Delta variant has led to an increase in the number and severity of pediatric cases. Experts urge all those old enough to be vaccinated to do so to shield those who are ineligible, such as children and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

What do I do if I contract COVID-19, or the Delta variant?

Doctors have developed treatment protocols for all forms of COVID-19. If you suspect you may have COVID-19, or are sick with the virus (3):

- Stay home except to get medical care: most people with COVID-19 have mild illness and can recover at home without hospitalization. Remember, going out and about, even to a hospital or clinic, can expose those around you to COVID-19.
- Be sure to get care if you have trouble breathing, or have any other emergency warning signs, or if you think it is an emergency. Where possible, call your doctor or hospital before you go in.
- Avoid public transportation, ridesharing, or taxis.
- If possible, at home, stay in a specific room and away from others. If you need to be around others (whether at home, or outside) wear a mask.
- Tell your close contacts that they may have been exposed to COVID-19 if you have been around them 48 hours (or 2 days) before you started having symptoms or tested positive. Letting close contacts know they may have been exposed protects them.
- Avoid sharing personal household items such as dishes, cups, utensils, towels etc, and clean all "high-touch" surfaces everyday.

What do I do with this information?

We hope that making the facts about COVID-19, and specifically the Delta variant, has made prevention and care a little less amorphous and more accessible to you. A few simple steps go a long way in preventing COVID-19 and its variants.

At HealthX, we believe you should have the power to make the best health and wellness decisions for yourself and your family, not driven by cost or fear, but by what you need. Be it preventive, promotive, curative, or rehabilitative primary health care, we strive to be your constant and trusted partner on your health and wellness journey, and to support you in achieving your dreams and aspirations for yourself and your family. If you have any questions or need any more information about COVID-19 or any health care issues, contact us anytime on our toll-free number **0800 720 795**.

Reference List
 1. Africa CDC (May 2021) The Use of Pulse Oximeter by Public & Healthcare Providers in the Community for Suspected and Confirmed COVID-19 Cases <https://africacdc.org/download/the-use-of-pulse-oximeter-by-public-healthcare-providers-in-the-community-for-suspected-and-confirmed-covid-19-cases/>
 2. Pearson CAB, Russell TW, Davies NG, et al. Estimates of severity and transmissibility of novel South Africa SARS-CoV-2 variant 501Y.V2. Available at: https://cmid.github.io/topics/covid19/reports/sg-novel-variant/2021_01_11_Transmissibility_and_severity_of_501Y_V2_in_SA.pdf
 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (March 2021) COVID19: What To Do If You Are Sick <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>
 4. <https://health.ucdavis.edu/coronavirus/covid-19-information/delta-variant.html>