

**Taking action against the new BA.4. BA.5 wave**

**Updated 15 July 2022**

Victoria is experiencing a new COVID wave.

This wave is caused by the new BA.4 and BA.5 COVID variants.

These are highly infectious and more able than previous variants to escape our immune defences, including among Victorians who have had COVID and been vaccinated.

**Changes announced (Pandemic Orders)**

1. Mask wearing is strongly recommended this winter if you are indoors in a public space or outside in a crowded place where you can’t physically distance. People who are at-risk of severe COVID illness are encouraged to wear a mask whenever out in public.
2. All Victorians are encouraged to work from home if they can.
3. The immunity period has been shortened from 12 to four weeks.
   * If you develop COVID symptoms four weeks or more after having COVID, stay home and get tested.
   * If someone you live with gets COVID more than four weeks after you had COVID you must take a RAT on at least five days of the next seven days.
4. For Victorians isolating with COVID there is now another reason to leave home, to provide transport for a household member to get essential food supplies.

**Prevention is the best protection**

Some people in our community are more vulnerable to severe illness from COVID because they have other health problems or are older.

We can all take steps right now to protect vulnerable Victorians and reduce COVID illness in our community.

**6 steps to protect yourself and others**

1. **Wear a mask**

* Good-quality face masks can stop viruses spreading.
* Where you can’t physically distance, it is strongly recommended that you wear outdoors in a public space or in a crowded place.
* If you are at-risk of severe COVID-19 illness, you are encouraged to are encouraged to wear a mask whenever out in public

1. **Let fresh air in**

* You are less likely to catch COVID in places that are well ventilated (have fresh air not stale air).
* Good ventilation comes from opening windows and doors, using fans and air purifiers, and meeting outside.

1. **Stay home if unwell**

* Stay home if you have any symptoms, even if you test negative.

1. **Get tested**

* Get tested as soon as you develop any symptoms.
* If you test positive you must isolate for 7 days and tell your contacts you have COVID. If you test negative you should stay home until your symptoms have cleared.
* A Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) is the quickest, easiest way for most people to test if they have COVID.
* If you test positive on a [rapid antigen test](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/about-rapid-antigen-tests), you are a COVID positive case.
* You are required by law to report your positive rapid antigen test result as soon as you can. To report your result, call the Coronavirus Hotline at [1800 675 398](tel:%201800675398), or fill in this [online form](https://dhvicgovau.powerappsportals.com/rapid-antigen-test/).

1. **Get medicines if at risk**

* Victorians who are more at risk from COVID may be eligible for medicines that reduce severe illness if taken soon after symptoms appear.
* You need a positive RAT or PCR test to get these medicines.
* You are eligible if you are 70 years of age and over.
* You may be eligible if you are 50 years of age and over with other health problems, or 30 years of age and over and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander with other health problems, or if you have a severe disability or are immune-compromised.
* If you have a positive test and are eligible for COVID medicines, speak with a GP or GP Respiratory Clinic as soon as possible.

1. **Get vaccinated**

* Being up to date with vaccination is your best protection against severe illness.
* Book your third dose or winter fourth dose with your GP or pharmacist now.
* You can get your flu vaccination and COVID booster at the same time.

**Masks – reducing COVID transmission**

Masks are very effective at reducing COVID transmission, especially high-quality masks and respirators like N95 and P2. The more people who wear masks the less virus transmission happens, and the fewer people who will get sick with COVID.

Wearing a cloth mask more than halves your risk of COVID infection. If you wear a surgical mask you reduce your risk of infection by two thirds (66%), and a N95/KN95 by over 83%.

Just wearing a mask when around other people will help keep you, your loved ones, and others safer.

**Types of masks**

Particulate filter respirators or N95 / P2 masks help protect against airborne or aerosol transmission. Medical and surgical grade masks can protect against larger droplets, and non-medical mask including homemade and sewn provide limited protection.

**Where to get help**

* Visit a [GP Respiratory Clinic](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/serviceprofiles/gp-respiratory-clinics) even if you have symptoms.
* Call [National Home Doctor Service](https://homedoctor.com.au/) on [13 7425](tel:137425) for bulk billed, after-hours home visits
* Or find a GP close to you:
* [Healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/)
* [Hotdoc.com.au](https://www.hotdoc.com.au/)
* [Healthshare.com.au](https://www.healthshare.com.au/)
* Contact National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 24 hours, 7 days
* Speak to your [pharmacist](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/serviceprofiles/Pharmacist)
* Visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au