

COVID-19 in the US: Hope, Caution, and Planning Are Warranted



To avoid a rough winter, we must start preparing now.

Mask wearing, social distancing, and vaccination this spring could get us closer to normal by summer.

Cases are dropping.

Vaccination is increasing.

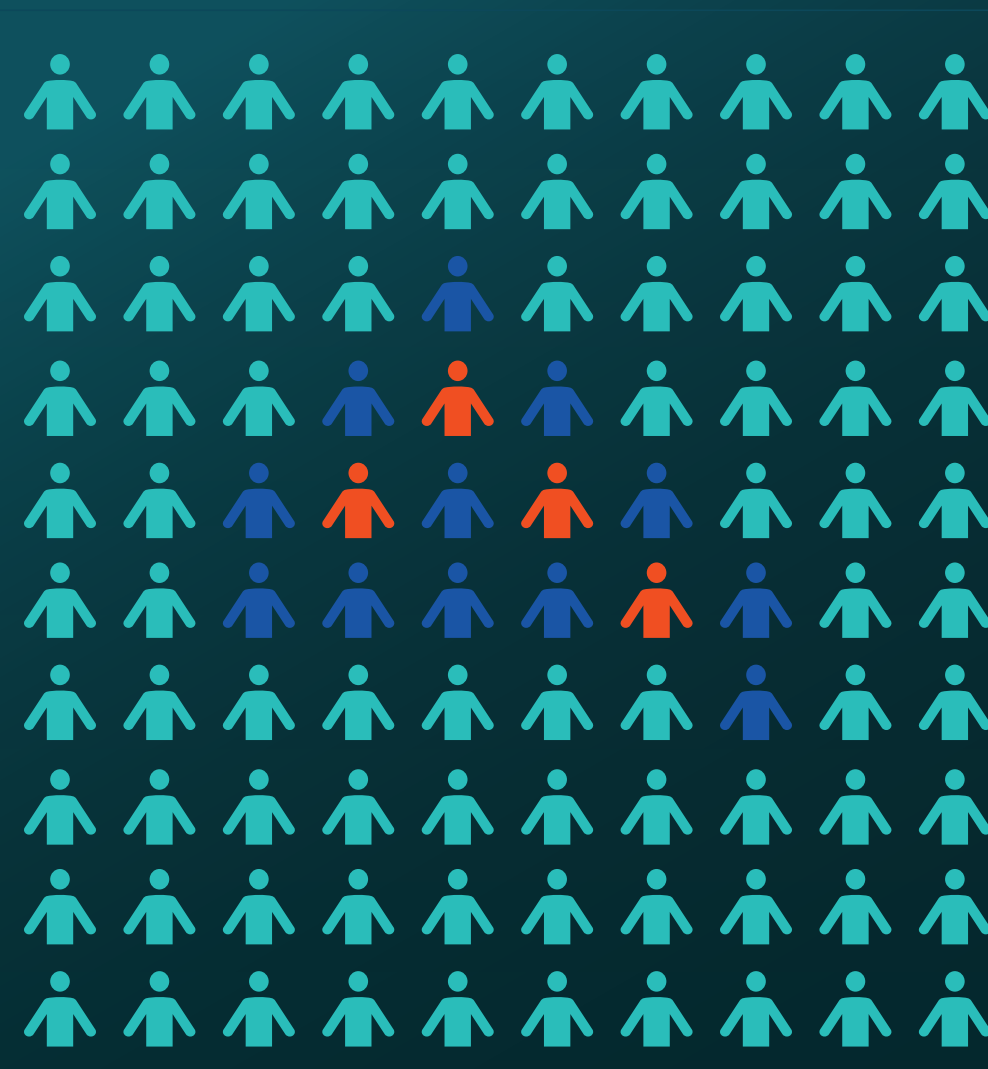
There is good reason for optimism, but we're not out of the woods yet. We aspire to reach **herd immunity**, and that's going to be a challenge.

What is herd immunity?

Herd immunity occurs when one infectious person is unable to infect more than one other susceptible person, and transmission then grinds to a halt.

This can happen when:

- A large portion of the population has been infected, recovered, and developed immunity.
- Large numbers of people are immune due to having been vaccinated.
- The two above combine to amplify population protection.



 Susceptible  Infected  Immune

Why is reaching herd immunity an uphill climb?

COVID-19 is seasonal. Like other coronaviruses, it spikes in the winter.

Without continued masking and social distancing, increased winter transmission is a real risk.

Variants keep coming, and vaccines are less effective against some of them.

Those who have had COVID-19 may not be immune to some of the new variants.

Vaccine hesitancy among adults and lack of a children's vaccine could mean that not enough people will be immunized to prevent COVID-19 spread.

We can get ahead of another tough winter if we start preparing now by:

Rolling out vaccinations in countries of all income levels as quickly as possible.

Planning for a possible surge of COVID-19 and flu cases to inundate hospitals in winter.

Encouraging at-risk individuals to wear masks and avoid high-risk settings in winter.

Continuing non-pharmaceutical interventions and not prematurely relaxing mandates.

Ramping up tracing and sequencing efforts to detect variants early and make it possible to modify vaccines quickly.

Keeping schools and workplaces open by promoting – and if possible, requiring – mask use and vaccination, and by limiting the size of meetings and classes.

To learn more visit, <http://bit.ly/JAMA-COVID19>