

WHY HERD IMMUNITY MATTERS



What is herd immunity or community immunity?

“Herd immunity” occurs when enough people in a community become immune to an infectious disease (through either vaccination or previous infection) to protect the community as a whole.¹ An infectious disease needs enough individuals in a population capable of being infected in order to spread. If enough of the population has immunity to the disease, its spread will decline, and those who do not have immunity will be protected.²

How many people have to be immune for a community to achieve herd immunity?

It varies from disease to disease. Measles requires approximately 95% of a population to be immune, while polio requires approximately 80% of the population to have immunity.³ The percentage required for COVID-19 herd immunity is unclear, given the need for boosters as the disease mutates.⁴

Why is herd immunity important?

Some groups of people cannot get vaccinated and may be especially vulnerable to severe disease. This includes newborn babies and the elderly, as well as people who have weak immune systems, are living with HIV, or are undergoing or have recently undergone chemotherapy.³ Herd immunity can indirectly protect these groups by making disease spread less likely.

Why are vaccines important for achieving herd immunity?

Unlike natural infection, vaccines create immunity by preventing the spread of diseases and the severe effects they can have on people’s health, such as respiratory illness, neurological disorder, paralysis and even death.⁵ They also keep disease outbreaks from overwhelming health care systems.²

How has herd immunity helped in the United States?

In the U.S., vaccines for diseases including smallpox, polio, diphtheria and rubella have all reduced the frequency and severity of outbreaks, as well as the deaths and debilitating injuries these diseases cause.²

¹ World Health Organization, <http://bit.ly/40bucM3>.

² Mayo Clinic, <http://bit.ly/3WKLEEb>.

³ Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, <http://bit.ly/3XH8s8V>.

⁴ Yale Medicine, <http://bit.ly/3kEGMmu>.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://bit.ly/3Hdvn4S>.

For more information on vaccines, visit the Vaccines Cause Adults page at: bakerinstitute.org/vaccines-cause-adults.

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**VACCINES
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