

Q&A | Understanding herd immunity against COVID-19

What is herd immunity?

Herd immunity, also called “community immunity,” occurs when a large percentage of the population is immune to a specific disease. Every single individual may not be immune, but enough people are protected to stop the virus from easily spreading person to person. This causes infection rates to drop drastically.

Why do we want it?

Herd immunity protects everyone, including at-risk populations like those with weakened immune systems, babies, or the elderly. Herd immunity against COVID-19 is key to ending this pandemic for all of us.

How is herd immunity achieved?

Herd immunity can be achieved through natural resistance, when the body fights off infection after exposure to a virus, or through vaccination. Health experts at the World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend widespread vaccination as the best and safest path to COVID-19 herd immunity.

How - and when - will we reach herd immunity against COVID-19?

Herd immunity levels vary by disease, so experts are still researching the exact number needed to achieve herd immunity against COVID-19. They anticipate between 70-85% of the population will need to be immune before we reach herd immunity against COVID-19.

What makes it difficult to achieve herd immunity?

Because COVID-19 is a new virus, there are still unanswered questions about how long vaccine and natural immunity lasts. New variants may also slow down progress.

What can I do?

As soon as you are eligible, get vaccinated. Widespread vaccination is key to achieving herd immunity and ending the pandemic. In the meantime, continue following safety protocols like physical distancing, masking, avoiding large gatherings, and practicing good hand hygiene.

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