

THE PANDEMIC HAS ENDED: What You Should Know



On January 31, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency because of the emergence of a novel virus, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). On Thursday, May 11, 2023, the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) declaration ended. In South Carolina, many of us lost our beloved families and friends, as there were 19, 791 deaths related to the coronavirus. Although COVID-19 no longer poses the societal medical emergency that it did when it first emerged, COVID-19 remains an ongoing public health challenge. During the pandemic, more than 104 million U.S. COVID-19 cases, 6 million related hospitalizations, and 1.1 million COVID-19-associated deaths were reported to CDC. COVID-19 was the third leading cause of death in 2020 and 2021 and the fourth leading cause in 2022. So, what does the end of this public health crisis mean for you, and how might you prepare for another pandemic?

WHAT WE KNOW:

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that spreads from person to person. Initially, the immediate risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus was thought to be low. However, older adults and people of varying ages who have serious underlying medical conditions were and are at higher risk for more serious complications. Therefore:



- Vaccines will remain available. The U.S. government is currently distributing free COVID-19 vaccines for all adults and children. To help keep communities safe from COVID-19, HHS remains committed to maximizing continued access to COVID-19 vaccines.
- COVID-19 at-home tests may not be covered by insurance. Insurance providers will no longer be required to waive costs or provide free COVID-19 tests. CDC's No Cost COVID-19 Testing Locator can help people find current community and pharmacy partners participating in the Increasing Community Access to Testing (ICATT) program.

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- Treatments will remain available. Medication to prevent severe COVID-19, such as Paxlovid, will remain available for free while supplies last. After that, the price will be determined by the medication manufacturer and your health insurance coverage. Check with your healthcare provider if you need early treatment to prevent severe COVID-19.
- DHEC continues to encourage people to get vaccinated and boosted, wear a mask when needed, and follow the latest guidance.

WHAT YOU CAN DO



Stay Healthy: Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions (heart disease, diabetes, stroke, hypertension, high cholesterol) are more likely to be at a higher risk for serious complications from such viruses as the coronavirus. Get vaccinated against COVID-19 if you have not already. Eat healthy, stay physically active, and drink plenty of water. If you smoke or vape/use e-cigarettes, try quitting!



Stay Prepared: Establish protocols NOW for your home, faith- and/or community-based organization. Create a health ministry team to provide continuous health awareness, education, and promotion activities to congregational members and community residents about choosing healthier lifestyles and sharing chronic disease prevention messages.



Stay Connected: Periodically check for updates by visiting relative websites and other social media outlets:
 CDC: www.cdc.gov/COVID19
 SC DHEC: www.scdhec.gov/COVID19
 HOTL: www.holdoutthelifeline.org

SOUTH CAROLINA Tobacco Quitline
 QUITNOW.NET/SOUTHCAROLINA 1-800-QUIT-NOW

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