

TO YOUR HEALTH

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Balancing Life In COVID Times

By Susan Cusson, NP

More than three years after the first case of covid was diagnosed, the national emergency for covid-19 will end soon on May 11. A growing number of Americans want to get back to normalcy and many have already returned to their pre-pandemic lives. Many others are still in flux, figuring out what's safe and what's too risky. Every individual is unique and their own risk tolerance can vary depending on personal medical history, experience and beliefs.

While much of the country moves forward getting on with life more or less as it was before the pandemic, communities of older adults are at higher risk and face greater challenges in creating a "new normal". In making decisions for the community, the balance of public health restrictions with quality of life and psychosocial well-being need to be carefully weighed.

With vaccinations and treatments, fewer people are falling seriously ill from covid. Overall, cases are milder and new variants are similar to older variants which may help our immunity against future cases.

Covid is becoming endemic and will remain with us for a long time. As people tire of covid precautions, they may try to convince themselves it's ok to not wear a mask. We all know people who've had mild cases and recovered quickly. This might lead one to feel there's no need to be worried about a light case. Some would say that a more rational decision is to recognize that over 300 people in the U.S. are still dying every day from covid. There's also much we still don't know about long covid, which can develop even after a mild case. People with post-covid conditions, also called long covid, can have a wide range of symptoms that can last weeks, months, or even years after infection.

This internal debate when weighing risk might create conflicting feelings. Holding two contradictory ideas in mind at the same time [the pandemic is over and covid is still a problem] can be emotionally unsettling. This is a form of cognitive dissonance. Another example of cognitive dissonance might be using plastic bags despite

knowing it's bad for the environment, or smoking even though we know it's bad for our health. We are most likely to experience cognitive dissonance if we feel a great sense of responsibility for engaging in behaviors of which we personally disapprove.

It's a strange time we're in, a confusing one for many people. Everyone's trying to figure out how to live their best life, relearning/reexperiencing many things we took for granted in the past. Covid impacted countless aspects of our lives. Most Americans are eating out again, visiting friends and returning to offices. On any given day, half the country might feel relieved that the pandemic is over, while the other half fears that life will never get back to normal. Many individuals have similar internal conflicting feelings about covid.

We've come a long way since 2020 and with some simple strategies, we can live full lives and maintain social connections that are so important to overall health and well-being. At the end of the day, people will accept different levels of risk. Here are some strategies to reduce your personal risk and live a more normal life.

1. Stay up to date with vaccinations. The most recent bivalent booster became available in the fall of 2022. It's been 6 months since the last booster for many of us. The FDA is currently meeting to decide when the next booster is needed. When that decision is announced, arrangements will be made to have the vaccine available at CWV. In future years researchers predict it will be an annual recommendation like the influenza vaccine.



2. Mask in higher risk settings. Be strategic, wear one in a crowded meeting, in the grocery store and at the doctor's office. Risk is cumulative, so every time you don a mask in a high-risk situation, you're lowering your odds of catching the virus.

3. Mask when you travel. Your risk for coming into contact with covid goes up when you fly. Lower it by wearing a mask in the security line and in crowded terminals. If you need to remove your mask to eat or drink, the safest time is during the flight when ventilation systems in airplanes is highly effective. Be sure to wear a mask during boarding and deplaning when ventilation systems may be off.

4. Avoid crowds. When weather allows, go outdoors for dinners and events, it's much safer than crowded indoor spaces. When you go to an indoor event, wear a mask. Younger generations are much more likely to take the risk of gathering indoors at concerts or sporting events unmasked. For this reason, multi-generational family gatherings may bring risk. Families might decide to limit exposure to high risk settings for a week before gathering with older family members.

5. Get treated. Paxlovid is a highly effective antiviral drug. It works best if started early on in the illness, within five days of symptom onset. Research indicates vaccination and Paxlovid may also decrease the risk of long covid.

6. Think about ventilation. The risk of spreading covid is significantly greater in poorly ventilated areas. Adding a portable air cleaner to a space can effectively double the ventilation in the room. Open windows when the weather allows.

7. Test wisely. While a negative home test means you're probably not contagious, it's not a guarantee you don't have covid. If you have cold symptoms or don't feel well, especially if you've had a known exposure to a virus or have been in a higher-risk situation such as traveling or attending a gathering, you should stay away from others or wear a mask until your symptoms subside — even if your test is negative.

Things will never be the same as before the pandemic but life is back to normal in many ways. Together we will continue to move forward in a meaningful way to live life to it's fullest, respect individual choices and each do our part in keeping this community vibrant and healthy.

Take The RIDE

by Maeve Lobo, LICSW

If you are considering giving up your car and wondering about alternative forms of transportation, consider registering for The RIDE, overseen by the MBTA. The RIDE runs from 5am to 1am daily and covers the Greater Boston area. It extends to Bedford and some of the neighboring towns. The RIDE can be awarded on a temporary or permanent basis. Though there is an interview process it is a fairly straightforward procedure.

The RIDE started in 1977 with two vehicles. In 1990 when the American with Disabilities Act was passed, it became ADA compliant. Since demand for the Ride has increased over the years the MBTA has introduced The Flex Ride. It now includes UBER and Lyft vouchers. Though marginally more expensive, Flex Rides are very convenient. The Ride permits you to bring a companion/aide to help out. They will travel free of charge.

If you are anticipating a medical procedure and will be incapacitated, consider applying for the **Medical RIDE**. The Clinic will be able to facilitate the application. It takes 72 hours for the MBTA to review the matter. It is normally valid for a month and can only be used for medically related matters.



The RIDE costs between \$3.35 to \$5.60 per trip. Though the MBTA requires 24 hours' notice to schedule a ride, it can be done at short notice, but a small premium will be added to the base cost. After being approved for The RIDE, it is advisable to set up an online account as it is much easier to schedule appointments, however rides can always be arranged over the phone.

As always the Clinic is happy to help with the application and set up subsequent rides.



REMINDER: Residents living in Apartments, Cluster Homes and Llewsac Lodge are considered visitors in Willard, Caswell and Ross-Worthen. Masks are required by DPH for visitors in these areas.