

# UWHealth: Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations is critical

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MADISON, Wis. – Vaccinated individuals older than 64 years old continue to be at a greater risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection as the vaccine protection wanes over time – meaning it is vital that people stay up to date with their vaccinations.

While COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations are nowhere close to the levels of the omicron variant-fueled spike in December 2021 and January 2022, case counts have risen in Wisconsin and people 65 years old and older are near the top of the case counts, according to the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#), despite the fact that this group has some of the highest vaccination rates in the state.

About 82% have received the initial vaccine series, but only 62% have received a booster dose, state data showed, and even fewer have received an additional booster dose, now recommended by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention for those 50 years old and older.

During the most recent peak in Wisconsin cases, the week of May 8, which included about 10,000 new cases, people 65 years old or older were responsible for about 2,600 cases.

The terminology can be confusing and lead some to think they are still protected when they may not be, according to Dr. Jim Conway, medical director, UW Health immunization program, and pediatric infectious disease physician, UW Health Kids.

The CDC recently tried to [clarify](#) how to describe someone who has the best vaccine protection by moving away from calling people “fully vaccinated” instead saying people should stay “up to date” on current vaccine recommendations. This is

because over time, additional booster doses are being recommended, changing the definition of “fully vaccinated” over time, Conway said.

“There’s been a lot of information coming at people and it’s understandable that some people thought they were still as protected as they could be, so it will be critical to spread the message that you should get every dose that is available to you to maximize your immunity,” he said.

That means people 50 years old and older, and people 12 years old and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised, should get the first two doses of the Moderna or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, plus the two booster doses, or the single Johnson & Johnson dose, plus the two available booster doses.

In addition to risk of infection, older individuals are also at the greatest risk of needing hospital care. Since the start of the pandemic, people 60 years old and older have made up 78% of hospitalizations, according to DHS [data](#).

“Older people often have weaker immune systems, so they need a boost, plus as society has relaxed public health measures in large part, staying up to date on your vaccinations is the best way to stay safe,” Conway said.

Conway is available for interviews today, and a recorded interview with Conway is available.