Herd Immunity

What is Herd Immunity?

Herd immunity, sometimes called community immunity, occurs when a high percentage of the population is immune to a disease. This immunity can happen through vaccination and/or prior illness thus making the spread of the infectious disease from person to person unlikely. Even individuals not vaccinated (such as newborns and the immunocompromised) are offered some protection because the disease has little opportunity to spread within the population.

How Does Herd Immunity Work?

- Immunized and healthy
- Not immunized but healthy
- Sick, contagious, and not immunized

Low vaccination coverage and/or low immunity gained from prior illness can lead to infectious diseases easily spreading from person to person.

When most of the population is vaccinated or has immunity, the spreading of an infectious disease from person to person is less likely to occur.

Why Build Herd Immunity?

Herd immunity protects the most vulnerable members of the population. Those who are considered vulnerable include babies who have not received vaccinations, pregnant women and the immunocompromised (e.g., those who have organ transplants or undergoing chemotherapy). If enough people are vaccinated or have immunity against diseases, individuals that are at higher risk and cannot get vaccinated have some protection against infection.

Herd Immunity and COVID-19

There currently is not a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. For herd immunity to occur the majority of the population would need to be vaccinated. Therefore, it may not be the best way to prevent the spread of the disease at this time. We are still learning about this new virus. For instance, it is still unknown whether a person can become re-infected and develop COVID-19 more than once. Until a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 is a reality, practicing social/physical distancing and other prevention methods is still recommended.\(^1\)

---

1Herd immunity. Retrieved from https://apic.org/monthly_alerts/herd-immunity/

Disclaimer:
This fact sheet is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $2,000,000 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.