

An epidemiologist answers questions about the Delta variant

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kbrannon@tulane.edu

(504) 862-8789



Epidemiologist Susan Hassig explains the risks from the Delta variant in the latest episode of Tulane's On Good Authority podcast. Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano.

The more contagious Delta variant of COVID-19 is rapidly spreading across the country and now represents more than 80 percent of sequenced cases in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

The virus is two to four times more transmissible than earlier strains and appears to make people infectious much sooner than the original SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus

that causes COVID-19, said epidemiologist [Susan Hassig](#) of [Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#).

“This virus seems to build up a larger quantity of virus particles in the upper part of the respiratory tract, where people can shed it more easily and in a greater volume,” Hassig said. “We are also seeing evidence that individuals are reaching that shedding level of virus much more quickly in the course of their own infection.”

Hassig spoke to Tulane’s [On Good Authority](#) podcast about what the public should know about the Delta variant as cases rise.

“If you are fully vaccinated, you are largely protected against this variant. But if you are not, you are vulnerable to a potentially life-threatening virus that is spreading very, very quickly,” Hassig said.

Hassig answers questions about the risks of breakthrough cases among the vaccinated, what parents should think about as school starts next month and whether we’re likely to need a vaccine booster shot later this year.

To hear the full discussion, listen below.