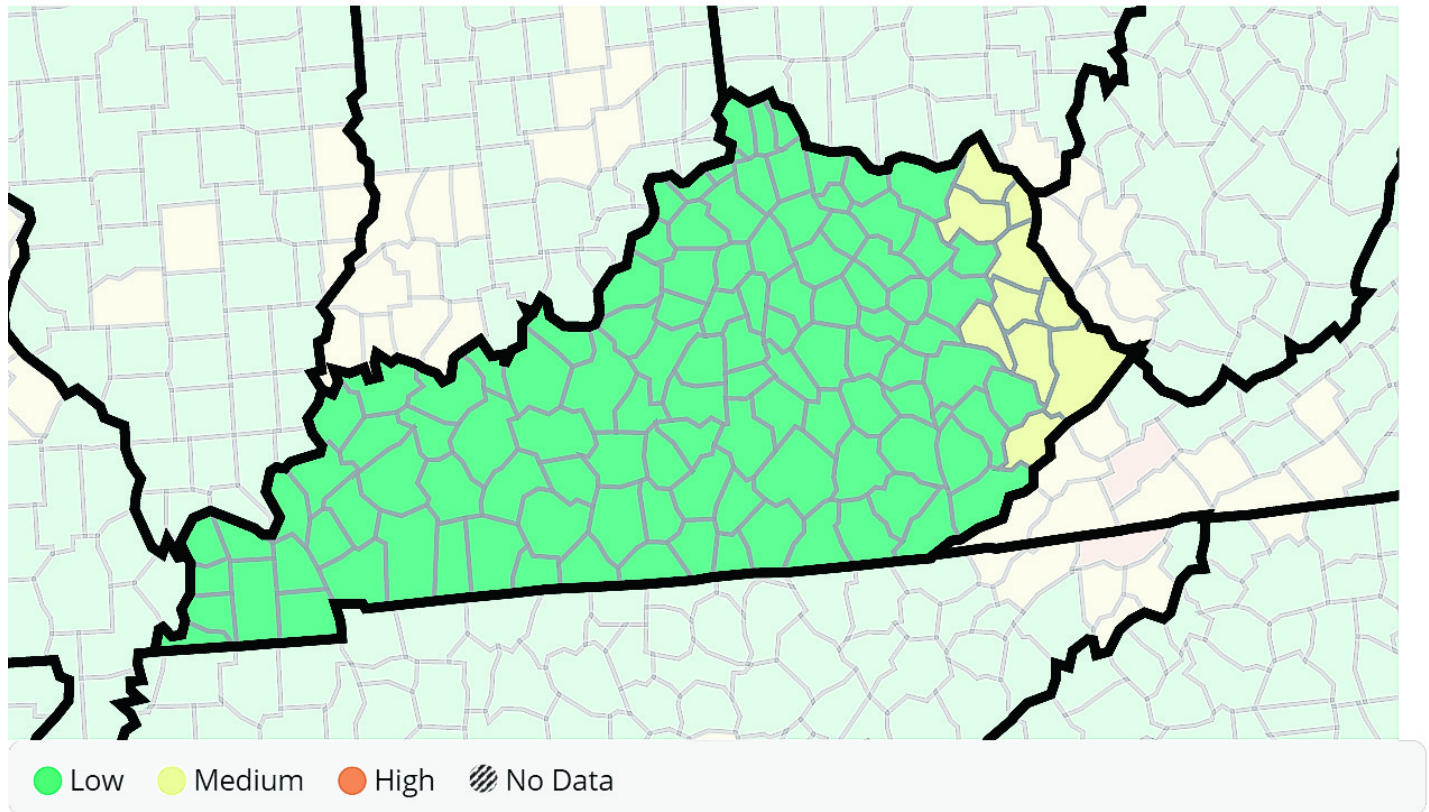


These holidays, we still need to think about COVID

COVID-19 Community Levels in Kentucky



Fri Nov 18 2022 11:30:13 GMT-0500

CDC

The latest COVID-19 Community Level map from the CDC shows that only 10 Kentucky counties are experiencing medium levels of the disease, and none are at high levels. The rest are seeing low Community Levels, per the CDC.

BY KEVIN KAVANAGH

I know that everyone is sick of hearing about COVID, and it is time to move on. But there are a number of danger signs forming, and if not heeded may place us all at risk.

We all are entering into a feel-good denial of the pandemic. Most of what I read refers to post-COVID or post-pandemic. As [far as data is concerned](#) there is seemingly good news. Although we had comparable cases compared to last year, deaths are markedly down.

For the upcoming holidays, the problem is three-fold. First, multiple studies have found Long COVID commonly occurs after mild and moderate infections. The last, [from Israel](#), found a 34.6% incidence of Long COVID in COVID-19 patients, 94% of whom were not hospitalized. There is also a realization that Long COVID commonly causes brain fog, cognitive dysfunction and heart disease. The latter was recently brought to the public's attention by the [death of food writer, Julie Powell](#), who died of cardiac disease which followed a "recent battle with COVID-19." We have [known for sometime](#) that COVID is

just as much a cardiac as a respiratory disease, but only recently has this begun to be accepted by the public.



The second problem is that the bivalent booster's protection is not absolute. I know of six individuals who have developed symptomatic COVID-19 after receiving the updated booster. Research appears mixed with some articles reporting an [augmented antibody response](#) compared to the original booster but others point to a problem of [immunological imprinting](#), where future responses are [targeted to the strain you are first exposed to](#) and not to the strain you are currently infected with.

Third, homes are one of the unsafest places. I use a portable CO2 monitor to determine air quality and circulation. Outside levels are approximately 400 ppm. Local businesses usually have levels below 700 ppm. Some such as Starbucks had the best levels around 500 ppm. But in homes, I often measure levels above 1100 ppm. This is far too high. With many people crowded into a family dining event, levels may go through the roof.

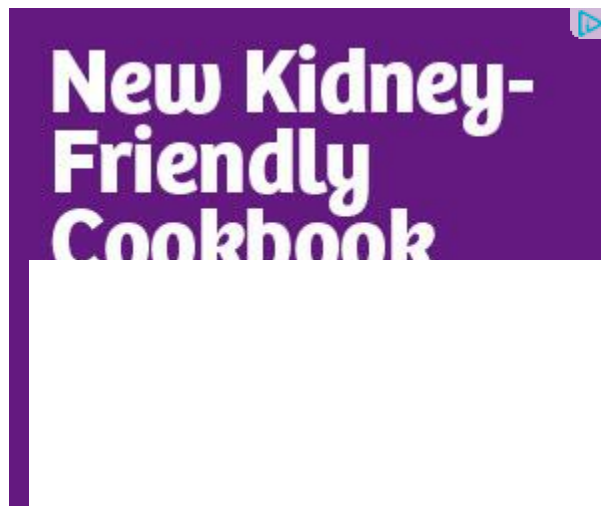
In addition, elderly relatives often attend holiday events (I'm included in this category). The virus does not care if you are meeting a relative you have not seen in 6 months or a stranger you have never seen. The virus will transmit.



All of the above can be a recipe for disaster. In our family we have all day grazing of food, and grandchildren will hug and be in the laps of elderly. Masking is not practical. Increasing ventilation and

home HEPA filters (MERV 13) may help decrease viral load, which some feel is linked to severity of disease, but in a crowded indoor event it is unlikely to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

But one can decrease the likelihood of a superspreader event by taking two simple steps. First, the pandemic emergency has been extended until Jan. 11, 2023. Thus, one can obtain free rapid tests through your insurance. This will allow everyone to be tested immediately before the event, which some research has shown can [decrease spread by 40%](#). Second, ask those attending a family gathering to not enter high risk settings and to wear an N95 mask in public a week before the event. These steps will add another layer of armor to avoid infecting a vulnerable loved one.



If you have been infected prior to BA.5 or not recently vaccinated, it is unlikely you will have optimal protection to ward off hospitalizations or death. The BQ variants also mean that one should wear an N95 mask, since even if you get a mild infection there is a significant risk of Long COVID.

With the upcoming holidays and family gatherings along with the public largely ignoring masking, testing and vaccinations, we may well be in for a holiday surge of COVID-19; adding to the increasing cases in RSV and seasonal flu. Masking, testing and vaccinations to flu and COVID are in themselves good steps, but taken together will give the best possible protection.



Kevin Kavanagh is a physician and the founder of HealthWatch USA.