

If you've received a COVID vaccine, how worried should you be about catching the Delta variant?

[Y]ou may have heard about Olympic athletes who are fully vaccinated getting positive Covid tests or people in Provincetown, Mass., or Texas Democrats or the New York Yankees. These are called breakthrough infections, and they're causing a lot of anxiety about whether the vaccines hold up against the hyper-transmissible Delta variant.

But how concerning are they? And as cases are surging across the country, how much do they matter as a metric of the pandemic when we have a vaccine to protect against severe disease?

STAT spoke with Céline Gounder, a clinical assistant professor of medicine and infectious disease at NYU's Grossman School of Medicine.

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[STAT]: Dr. Gounder, how concerned are you about these instances of breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated?

[Dr. Gounder]: I think we really need to better define what we mean by breakthrough infections. That's really a catch-all for people who might have an infection with no, or very mild, symptoms, all the way to somebody who might end up in the ICU, or even dead.

What concerns me is breakthrough disease — people who have significant symptoms, who are struggling to breathe, who are ending up in the hospital, and we really haven't seen breakthrough disease with the vaccines.

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