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The Delta variant is a 'serious threat' as contagious as chickenpox, the C.D.C. finds.

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The Delta variant is much more contagious, more likely to break through protections afforded by the vaccines and may cause more severe disease than all other known versions of the virus, according to an internal presentation circulated within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the director of the agency, [acknowledged on Tuesday](#) that vaccinated people with so-called breakthrough infections of the Delta variant carry just as much virus in the nose and throat as unvaccinated people, and may spread it just as readily, if less often.

But the internal document lays out a broader and even grimmer view of the variant.

The Delta variant is more transmissible than the viruses that cause MERS, SARS, Ebola, the common cold, the seasonal flu and smallpox, and it is as contagious as chickenpox, according to the document, a copy of which was obtained by The New York Times.

The immediate next step for the agency is to “acknowledge the war has changed,” the document said. Its contents were [first reported](#) by The Washington Post on Thursday evening.

The document’s tone reflects alarm among C.D.C. scientists about Delta’s spread across the country, said a federal official who has seen the research described in the document. The agency is expected to publish additional data on the variant on Friday.

The agency’s new masking guidelines for vaccinated people, introduced on Tuesday, were based on the information presented in the document. The C.D.C. recommended that vaccinated people wear masks indoors in public settings in communities with high transmission of the virus.

But the internal document hints that even that recommendation may not go far enough. “Given higher transmissibility and current vaccine coverage, universal masking is essential,” the document said.