

1 **Community vaccination can shorten the COVID-19 isolation**
2 **period: an individual-based modeling approach**

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NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used to guide clinical practice.

24 **Abstract**

25 **Background:** Isolation of infected individuals and quarantine of their contacts are usually
26 employed to mitigate the transmission of SARS-CoV-2. While 14-day isolation of infected
27 individuals could effectively reduce the risk of subsequent transmission, it also significantly
28 impacts the patient's financial, psychological, and emotional well-being. It is, therefore, vital
29 to investigate how the isolation duration could be shortened when effective vaccines are
30 available and in what circumstances we can live with COVID-19 without isolation and
31 quarantine.

32 **Methods:** An individual-based modeling approach was employed to estimate the likelihood of
33 secondary infections and the likelihood of an outbreak following the isolation of an index case
34 for a range of isolation periods. Our individual-based model integrates the viral load and
35 infectiousness profiles of vaccinated and unvaccinated infected individuals. The effects of
36 waning vaccine-induced immunity against Delta and Omicron variant transmission were also
37 investigated.

38 **Results:** In the baseline scenario in which all individuals are unvaccinated, and no
39 nonpharmaceutical interventions are employed, there is a chance of about 3% that an
40 unvaccinated index case will make at least one secondary infection after being isolated for 14
41 days, and a sustained chain of transmission can occur with a chance of less than 1%. We found
42 that at the outbreak risk equivalent to that of 14-day isolation in the baseline scenario, the
43 isolation duration can be shortened to 7.33 days (95% CI 6.68-7.98) if 75% of people in the
44 community are fully vaccinated during the last three months. In the best-case scenario in which
45 all individuals in the community are fully vaccinated, isolation of infected individuals may no
46 longer be necessary, at least during the first three months after being fully vaccinated,
47 indicating that booster vaccination may be required after being fully vaccinated for three to
48 four months. Finally, our simulations showed that the reduced vaccine effectiveness against
49 Omicron variant transmission does not much affect the risk of an outbreak if the vaccine
50 effectiveness against infection is maintained at a high level via booster vaccination.

51 **Conclusions:** The isolation duration of a vaccine breakthrough infector could be safely
52 shortened if a majority of people in the community are immune to SARS-CoV-2 infection. A
53 booster vaccination may be necessary three months after full vaccination to keep the outbreak
54 risk low.

55

56 **Background**

57 SARS-CoV-2 spreads rapidly throughout the world, causing over 288.23 million
58 infections and 5.48 million deaths by the end of 2021 [1]. During the early phase of
59 transmission, when vaccines were unavailable, nonpharmaceutical interventions have been
60 frontline measures to mitigate the transmission [2, 3]. Isolation, i.e., separation and limitation
61 of mobility of infected people, is a critical strategy widely employed to break the transmission
62 chain. Institution-based isolation of confirmed cases has been shown in a modeling study to
63 delay the epidemic's peak and reduce the epidemic's size by approximately 57% [4]. Isolation,
64 however, will be effective only if it can be promptly employed to prevent presymptomatic and
65 asymptomatic transmission [5]. In addition, the isolation period should also be long enough to
66 ensure that the infected individuals do not spread the disease after the isolation. However, while
67 prolonged confinement may reduce the risk of transmission more effectively, it may have a
68 significant impact on the patient's financial, psychological, and emotional well-being [6-8].

69 COVID-19 vaccines were first made available in the last month of 2020 [9], and they
70 have been shown to be effective at preventing infection and transmission [10-12]. Despite the
71 fact that infections can occur even after being fully vaccinated, a faster viral clearance was seen
72 in the breakthrough infections, resulting in a shorter duration of infectiousness [13, 14]. As a
73 result, it suggests that those who have been vaccinated may require a shorter period for
74 isolation. It is vital to comprehend how the isolation duration could be reduced based on
75 vaccine effectiveness, particularly when we want to return to normalcy and live with COVID-
76 19 without quarantine and isolation measures.

77 In this study, we used an individual-based modeling approach to assess the likelihood
78 of secondary infections and the likelihood of an outbreak following isolation of a vaccinated
79 index case for a range of isolation periods. Our individual-based model accounts for
80 transmission heterogeneity, variation in the course of infection, and the disease's infectivity
81 profile. The effects of waning vaccine-induced immunity and the delay in isolating infected
82 individuals in the community were also examined.

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85 **Methods**

86 **Estimation of infectiousness profiles and vaccine efficiency against** 87 **transmission**

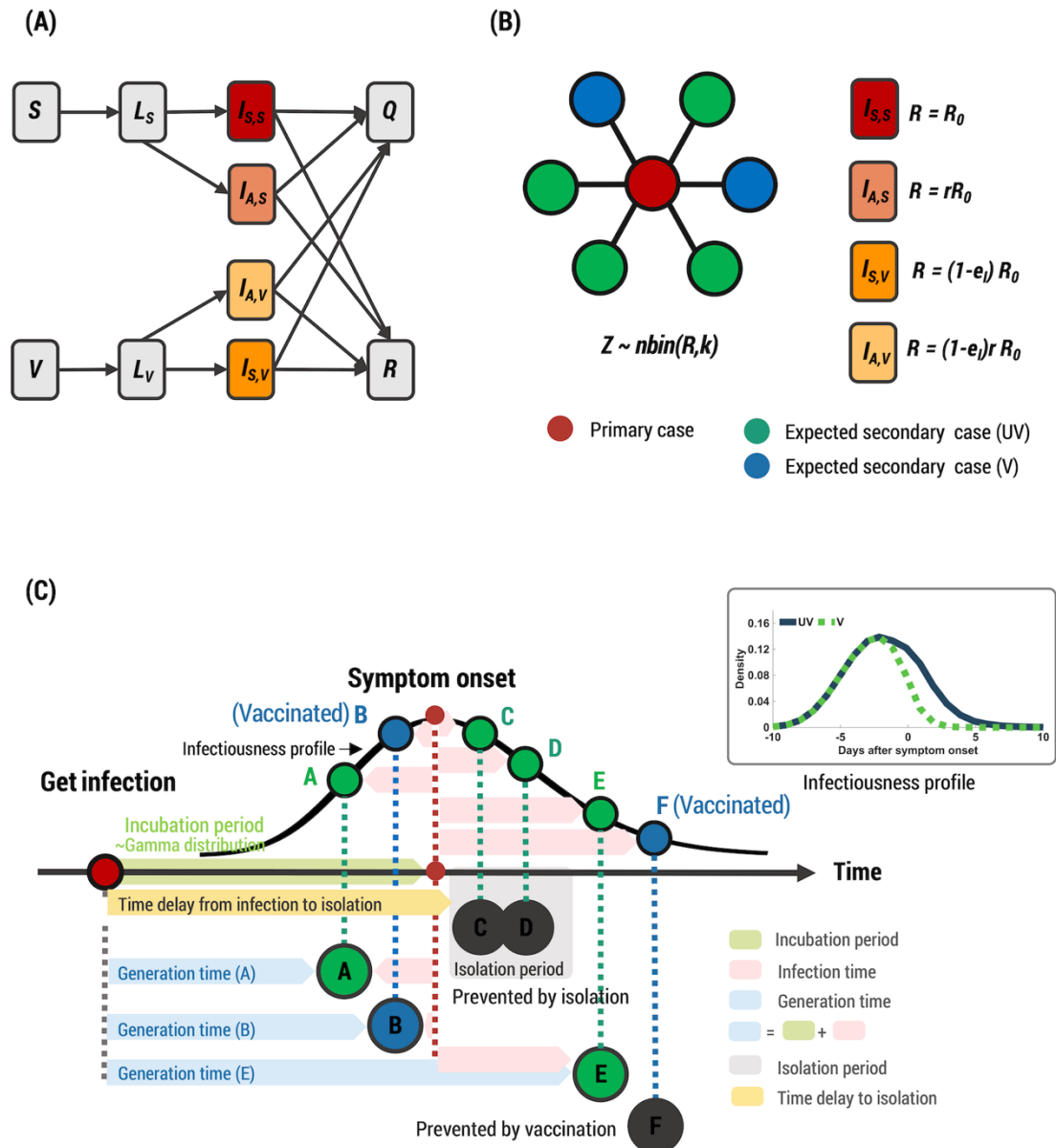
88 People infected with SARS-CoV-2 can become infectious prior to the onset of
89 symptoms. In the case of unvaccinated individuals, the infectiousness peaks 2.1 days before
90 the start of symptoms and then decreases gradually during the course of the illness [15]. Viral
91 trajectories in proliferation duration are similar in the unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals,
92 but the viral load is cleared faster in vaccine breakthrough infection than in the unvaccinated
93 group [13, 14]. The disease infectiousness (F) prior to the peak of both vaccinated and
94 unvaccinated infectors was therefore assumed to follow a gamma distribution, as described in
95 [15]. After the peak period, data on C_t values collected in Singapore [13] were used to
96 determine the infectiousness profile. The infectiousness was considered to be directly
97 proportional to the viral load (V) that exceeds a threshold of 10^6 copies, i.e., $F \propto Vx10^{-6}$ [16]. C_t
98 values were converted to viral load (V) using the procedures outlined in [14]. Because of the
99 faster viral clearance time, the disease transmissibility of vaccinated infectors could be averted
100 compared to unvaccinated ones. In this work, we estimated the vaccine efficacy against
101 transmission from a percentage of reduction in the area under the curves of the disease
102 infectiousness profiles.

103

104 **Model structure**

105 In order to examine the probability of post-isolation infections, the transmissions of the
106 COVID-19 were simulated with individuals categorized as susceptible (S), latent (L), infectious
107 (I), recovered (R), isolated (Q), and fully vaccinated (V) according to their infection and
108 vaccination status. Infectious individuals are further divided into symptomatic (I_S) and
109 asymptomatic (I_A) groups, with the assumption that asymptomatic individuals are less
110 infectious than symptomatic ones. Although COVID-19 vaccines cannot entirely protect
111 people against the infection, they are still beneficial in decreasing the chance of infection and
112 the chance of becoming symptomatic. In addition, even vaccinated individuals do get infected,
113 they will be less likely to transmit the disease to other individuals. In our model, vaccine
114 breakthrough infections are distinguished from infections in susceptible individuals by

115 subscripts V and S , as shown in **Figure 1(A)**. After being infected, individuals enter a latent
 116 state before becoming infectious. Finally, infectious individuals move either to recovered or
 117 isolated compartments.



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119 **Figure 1: Model structure of the COVID-19 transmission.** (A) Schematic of the
 120 compartmental model showing progressive of the disease and transition of individuals across
 121 different compartments. (B) Example of the expected number of secondary cases made by a
 122 single primary case drawn from a negative binomial distribution. (C) An illustration of
 123 transmission events due to the primary case (red circle). The generation time is a time duration
 124 between a primary case's infection and one of its subsequent secondary cases. The incubation

125 period is a time duration from exposure to symptom onset. The inset shows the infectiousness
126 profiles of unvaccinated (UV) and vaccinated (V) individuals.

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128 The number of secondary infections caused by a single primary case, Z , for each
129 infected individual is estimated from a negative binomial distribution with a mean equal to the
130 reproduction number (R_0) and dispersion parameter (k) (**Figure 1(B)**). Because of the lower
131 infectivity of asymptomatic infectors, they contribute fewer infections; the mean number of
132 secondary cases made by an asymptomatic individual was reduced by a factor r . For the vaccine
133 breakthrough infectors, the mean of the distribution is also reduced due to the efficiency against
134 transmission (e_I) of vaccines.

135 An example of the transmission events is illustrated in **Figure 1(C)**. The incubation
136 period, time from exposure to symptom onset, is assumed to follow the Gamma distribution
137 with a mean of 5.8 days [15]. The time of each new infection is drawn from a random number
138 distribution that is distributed according to the infectiousness profile of the infectors.
139 Transmission can take place before symptoms start. As a result of the vaccine's effectiveness
140 against infection, vaccinated persons are less likely to become infected. The effective infectious
141 period was determined by whether or not they were isolated. If infectors are isolated, they will
142 be contagious until they are isolated. Although transmission can be prevented during the
143 isolation period, post-isolation infections are still possible. The generation time between
144 infection of a primary case and one of its subsequent secondary cases is dependent on both the
145 incubation period and the infection time. In our study, the primary index case is assumed to be
146 isolated immediately after becoming infected, whereas other subsequent infected individuals
147 in the community are isolated with a delay of 6.8 days.

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154 **Table 1: Model parameters and their default values**

Parameter	Default value	Source
Basic reproduction number (R_0)	5.08	[17]
Overdispersion parameter (k)	0.08	[18]
Incubation period distribution (Gamma distribution)		
- Mean	5.8 days	
- Shape parameter	3.64	[15]
- Scale parameter	1.59	
Probability of being symptomatic		
- Unvaccinated individuals	0.573	[19]
- Vaccinated individuals	0.431	[19]
Reduction in infectiousness of asymptomatic individual (r)	0.58	[20]
Vaccine efficiency against infection (e_s)	0.79	[12]
Vaccine efficiency against transmission (e_t)	0.25	Estimation
Probability that symptomatic individuals will be isolated	0.8	Assumption
Probability that asymptomatic individuals will be isolated	0.1	Assumption
Time delay from infection to isolation		
- Index case	0 days	Assumption
- Infected individuals in community	6.8 days	Assumption

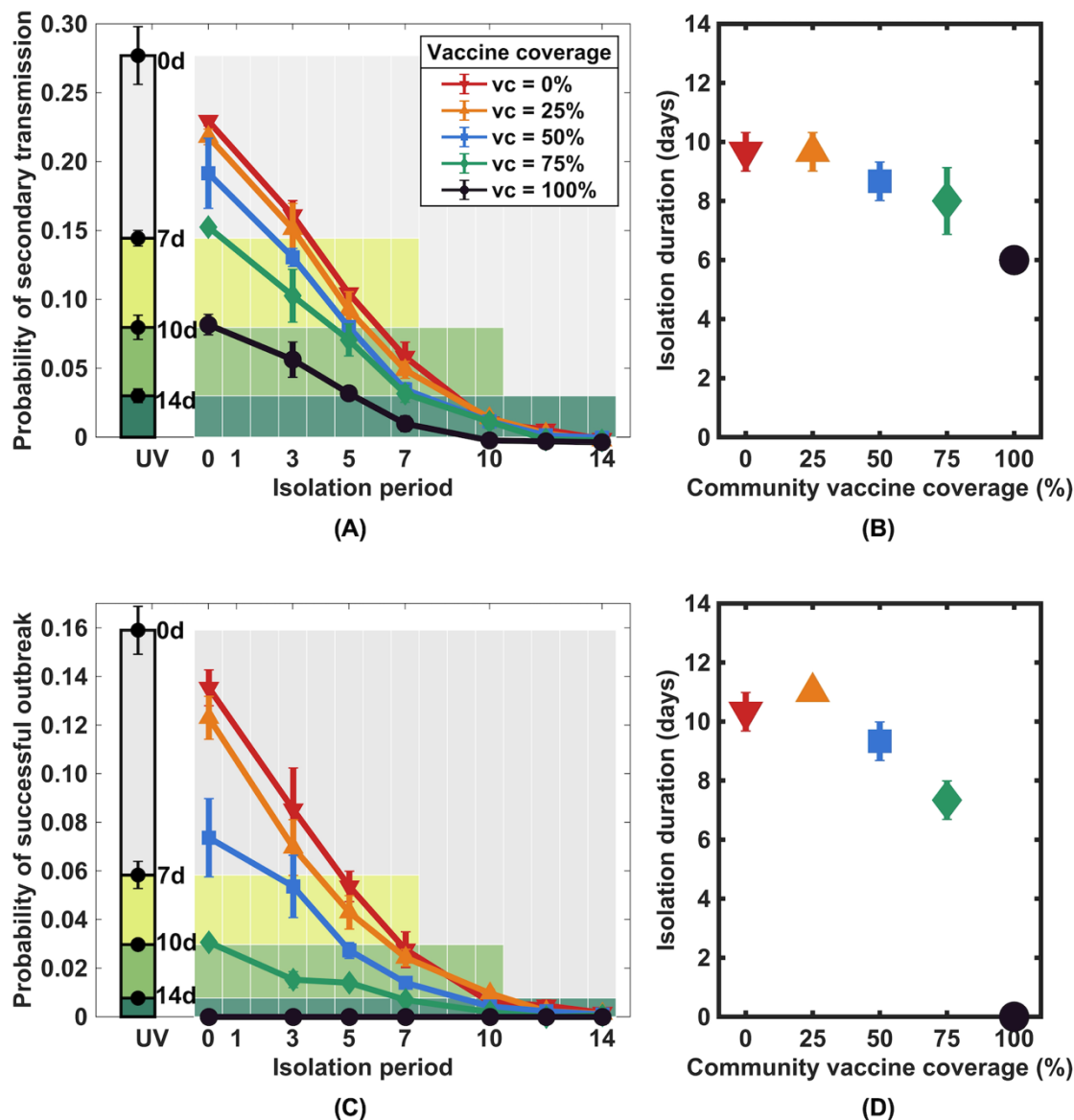
156 Results

157 Impact of vaccination on post-isolation transmission

158 We explored the probability of a primary infected individual making at least one
159 secondary infection and the probability of a successful outbreak, i.e., having a sustained chain
160 of transmission, after being released from isolation. In the baseline scenario in which the
161 primary case and all other individuals in the community are unvaccinated, we found that there
162 is a chance of about 3% that the unvaccinated index case will make at least one secondary
163 infection after being isolated for 14 days, and a sustained chain of transmission can occur with
164 a chance of less than 1% (left bars in

165 **Figure 2(A)-(B)**). However, if the index case has already been vaccinated, we found
166 that although all other individuals in the community are unvaccinated, only about 10 days of
167 isolation is equivalent to 14-day isolation of unvaccinated index case (red lines and red symbols
168 in **Figure 2**).

169 Vaccinating people in the community can further reduce the likelihood of secondary
170 infection and the probability of a successful outbreak. It was found that higher community
171 vaccine coverages decrease the chance of secondary infection following the isolation of the
172 vaccinated index case more, especially when the isolation periods are short. In addition, when
173 the isolation period is longer than 12 days, there is no apparent difference between different
174 vaccination coverages. At the outbreak risk equivalent to that of 14-day isolation in the baseline
175 scenario, the isolation duration of the primary vaccinated infector can be shortened to 9.33 days
176 (95% CI 8.68-9.98) if 50% of people in the community are vaccinated. When 75% of people
177 in the community are vaccinated, the isolation period can be further shortened to 7.33 days
178 (95% CI 6.68-7.98). Finally, we found that in the extreme limit in which all individuals are
179 vaccinated, although post-isolation infections are still possible for the isolation period of
180 shorter than 6 days, the chance of sustained chain of transmission to occur is extremely rare.
181 In this case, isolation may no longer be necessary (**Figure 2 (D)**).



182 **Figure 2: Impacts of isolating a primary vaccinated infector on post-isolation**
 183 **transmission.** Probability of secondary transmission (A) and probability of successful
 184 outbreak in which a chain of transmission can be sustained (C) after a range of isolation periods
 185 and vaccination levels in the community. The corresponding probabilities in the baseline
 186 scenario where the index case and all other individuals in the community are unvaccinated are
 187 shown as bar graphs on the left side of both subfigures. (B) and (D) show the isolation period
 188 equivalent to the 14-day isolation period in the baseline scenarios regarding the probability of
 189 secondary transmission and the probability of a successful outbreak, respectively. Error bars
 190 indicate 95% CI.

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193 Effect of waning vaccine-induced immunity

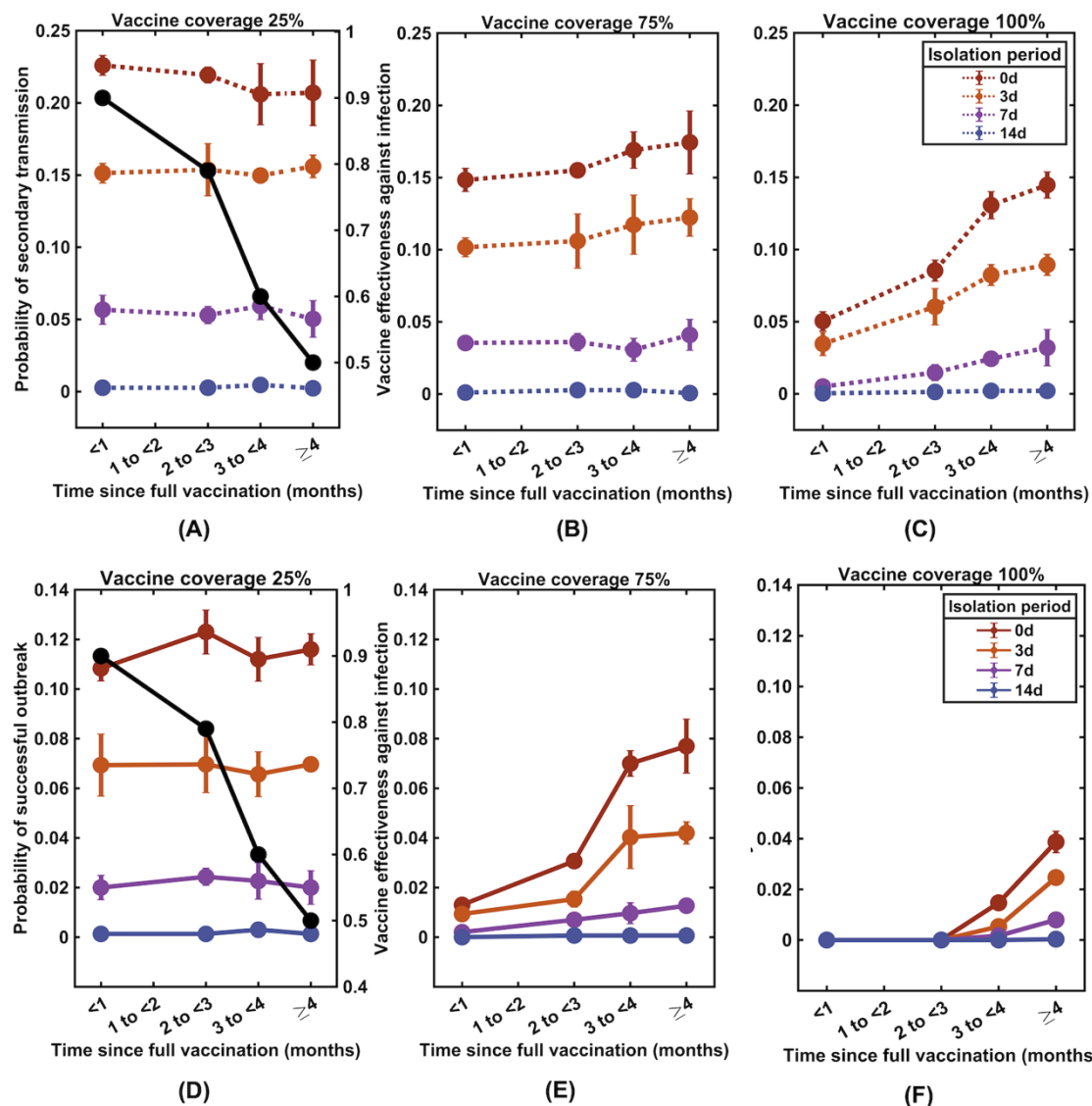
194 As the vaccine effectiveness decreases over time [21], we evaluated its effect on the
195 probability of secondary infection and the probability of a successful outbreak following
196 isolation. We found that for a low level of immunization (< 25% coverage), both the post-
197 isolation transmission probability and the successful outbreak probability are not significantly
198 affected by the waning of vaccine effectiveness (**even** there is no isolation.

199 We also investigated how the change in vaccine effectiveness against transmission
200 would influence the likelihood of secondary infection and the probability of a successful
201 outbreak. In this part, we considered the vaccine effectiveness against transmission (e_I) ranges
202 from 0% to 40%, and the vaccine effectiveness against infection (e_S) of 0.9 and 0.5,
203 corresponding to the effectiveness against infection after being fully vaccinated for one month
204 and four months, respectively. We found that during the first four months after complete
205 vaccination, when the vaccine effectiveness against infection is high, the vaccine effectiveness
206 against transmission had only a minor effect on the transmission, especially when the isolation
207 period is long (**Figure 4**).

208 **Figure 3 A and D**). However, for higher vaccine coverage, the effect of the decline in
209 the vaccine effectiveness is more pronounced, especially when the isolation durations are short.
210 Note, however, that although at high vaccination coverage (> 75% coverage), there is a more
211 significant effect of immunity waning across a range of isolation periods, the probability of an
212 outbreak is still lower than that in the case when 25% of the population are vaccinated. With
213 the vaccine coverage of 75%, for example, after 4 months of vaccination, the outbreak risk
214 climbs from 0.9% to 4.2% for 3-day isolation and increases from 1.3% to 7.7% for no isolation.
215 When all individuals in the community are vaccinated, despite a substantial decrease in vaccine
216 effectiveness after four months, the chance of a successful outbreak is still lower than 4% even
217 there is no isolation.

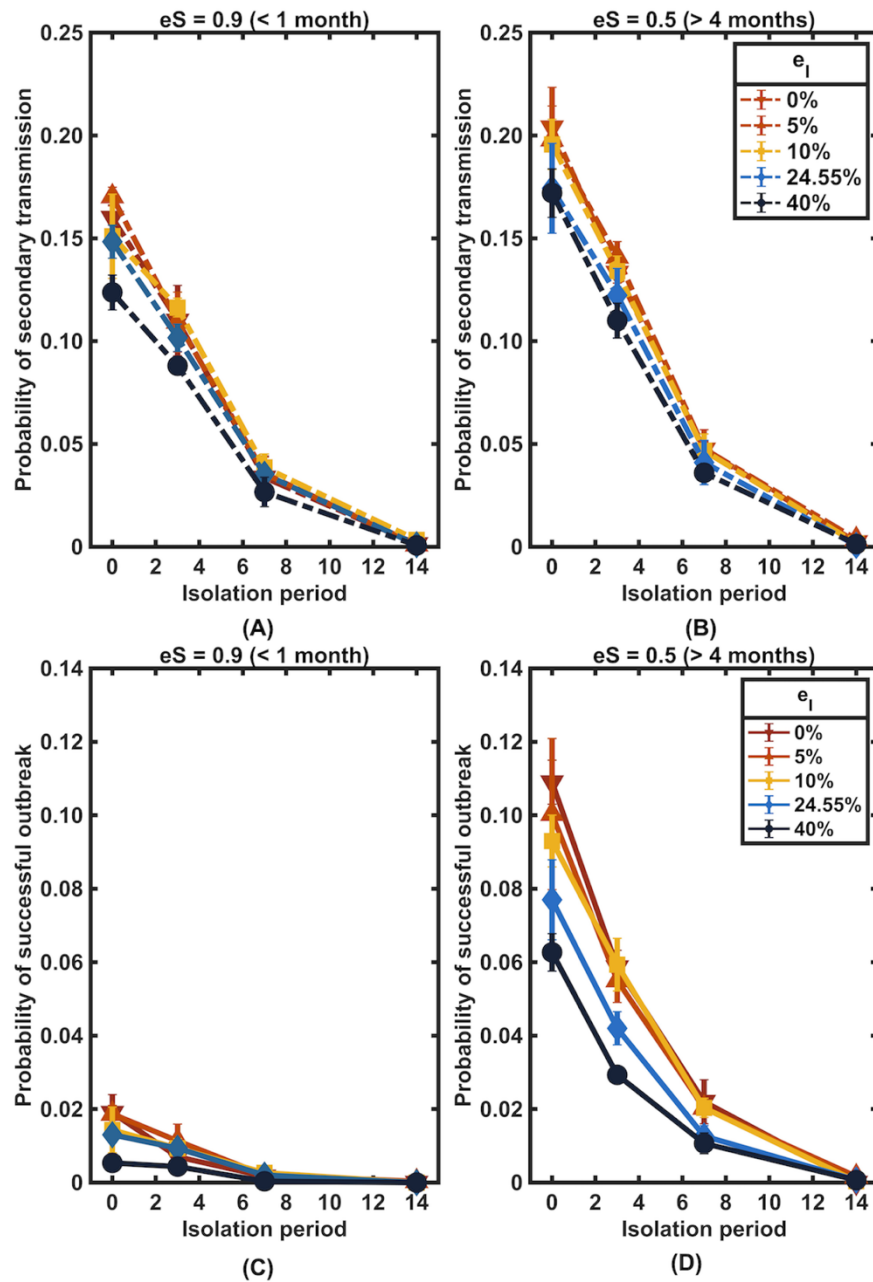
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222 corresponding to the effectiveness against infection after being fully vaccinated for one month
223 and four months, respectively. We found that during the first four months after complete

224 vaccination, when the vaccine effectiveness against infection is high, the vaccine effectiveness
 225 against transmission had only a minor effect on the transmission, especially when the isolation
 226 period is long (Figure 4).



227 **Figure 3: The effect of reduction in vaccine effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2 infection.**
 228 The time evolution of the probability of at least one secondary infection (A-C) and probability
 229 of successful outbreak (D-F) following the release of a breakthrough infector from isolation as
 230 the vaccine effectiveness against infection wanes (black lines, right y-axis) [21].

231



232 **Figure 4: The influence of vaccine effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2 transmission.** The
233 probability of at least one secondary infection (A and B) and a successful outbreak (C and D)
234 after being released from isolation into a community with a vaccination level of 75%. The
235 vaccine effectiveness against transmission (e_i) was varied from 0% to 40%, and the vaccine
236 effectiveness against infection (e_s) was fixed at 0.9 (left column) and 0.5 (right column).

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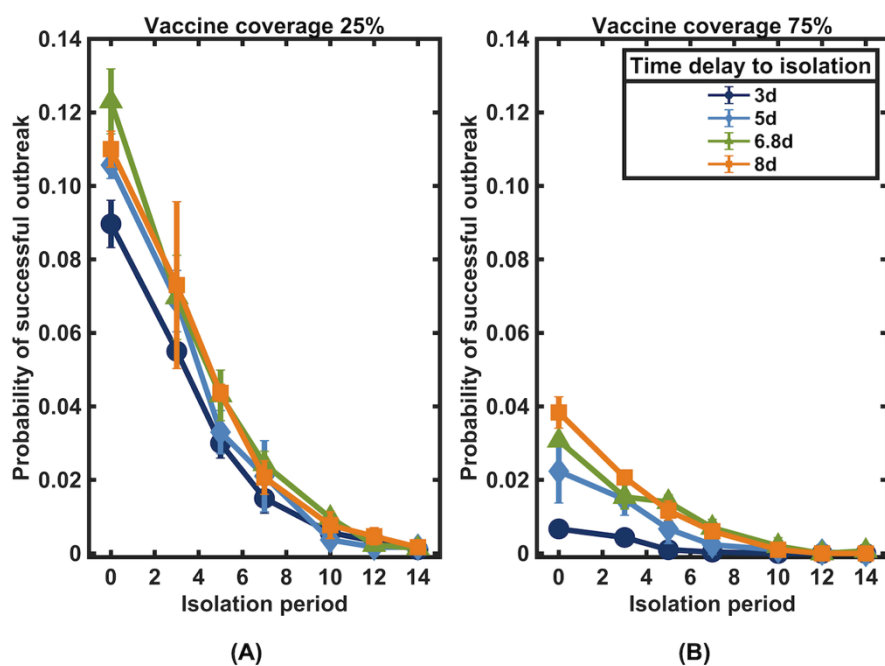
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240 Impact of community case-isolation and other control measures

241 We next evaluated the impact of time delay from infection to the isolation of infected
242 individuals in the community on the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Our results indicated that the
243 outbreak would be less likely to occur if case isolation is performed with a shorter delay (

244 **Figure 5**). For example, under the vaccine coverage of 75%, the outbreak risk could be
245 suppressed to low than 1% if the isolation can be performed within 3 days after infections. To
246 maintain the same level of an outbreak risk, a longer duration of the isolation is needed for the
247 isolation with longer delays. For instance, for a 5-day delay, at least 5 days of isolation may be
248 required, and for a 7-day delay, at least 7 days of isolation may be needed. When only 25% of
249 individuals are vaccinated, isolation may be required for at least 10 days, regardless of how
250 quickly infected individuals are isolated.

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252 **Figure 5: Impact of time delay from infection to isolation under vaccination coverages**
253 **of (A) 25% and (B) 75%.**

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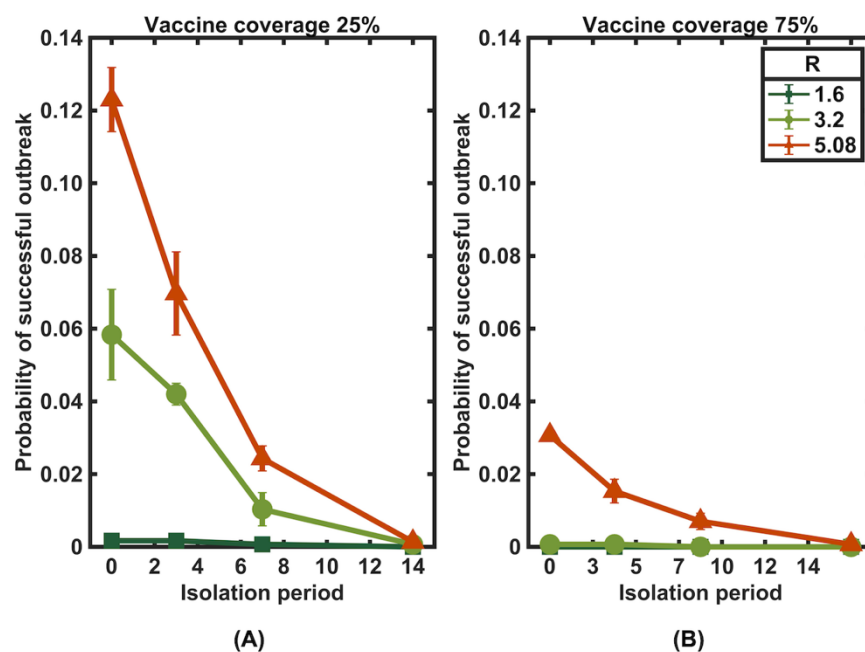
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260 The effective reproduction number (R) is commonly used to measure the disease
261 transmissivity under different control measures. To consider the effects of other control
262 measures, a sensitivity analysis on the effective reproduction number has been performed. In
263 combination with other non-pharmaceutical interventions, we found that community
264 vaccination could further shorten the isolation period (**Figure 6**). For instance, in the absence
265 of any non-pharmaceutical interventions and the vaccine coverage is only 25%, case isolation
266 may be required for at least 12 days to reduce the outbreak risk to 1%. However, if other control
267 measures are concurrently implemented at a level that could reduce the effective reproduction
268 number to 3.2, only one week of isolation is sufficient. Importantly, in this case, isolation will
269 be no longer necessary if the community vaccination level reaches 75%.
270



271 **Figure 6: A sensitivity analysis on the effective reproduction number.** The probability of
272 successful outbreak under the community vaccination coverages of (A) 25% and (B) 75% with
273 the time delay to the isolation of 6.8 days.

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279 Discussion

280 In this work, we evaluated the likelihood of at least one secondary infection and the
281 likelihood of an outbreak following the isolation of a vaccine breakthrough infector for a
282 specified period of time. Our modeling results indicated that vaccines play a critical role in
283 reducing the likelihood of post-isolation transmission. We discovered that the duration of
284 isolation for an infected individual who has already been vaccinated could be reduced as
285 opposed to the 14-day duration of isolation for unvaccinated individuals. Additionally, the
286 duration of isolation can be reduced further if the majority of the community members are
287 immune to the disease.

288 In the best case in which all individuals in the community are fully vaccinated, isolation
289 of infected vaccinated individuals may no longer be required, at least during the first three
290 months after being fully vaccinated, if no other non-pharmaceutical interventions are
291 implemented. After four months, however, as the vaccine effectiveness against infection drops
292 to around 53% [21], the probability of post-isolation transmission increases rapidly after this
293 time, especially in the cases of short isolation periods. This result indicates that booster
294 vaccination may be needed after being fully vaccinated for three to four months; otherwise,
295 more extended isolation periods or other non-pharmaceutical control measures may be
296 necessary to compensate for the increased transmission risk.

297 With a faster viral clearance time in vaccinated individuals, vaccines have been
298 hypothesized to reduce onward transmission from infected vaccinated individuals. According
299 to our estimations, the vaccine effectiveness against transmission of 24.6% is comparable to
300 the effectiveness against transmission with the Delta variant after getting two doses of the
301 Pfizer vaccine [22]. However, the emergence of the Omicron variant has raised serious
302 concerns about its capability to evade vaccine protection. After receiving two doses of mRNA
303 vaccines, the vaccine effectiveness in preventing Omicron-variant transmission drops to less
304 than 5% [22]. Nevertheless, our simulations showed that the reduced vaccine effectiveness
305 against Omicron-variant transmission does not much affect the risk of secondary infection if
306 the vaccine effectiveness against infection is maintained at a high level, possibly via booster
307 vaccination [23].

308 When considering the effect of delay in isolation of infected individuals in the
309 community, we found that a shorter delay to isolation can further shorten the isolation period,
310 especially in the high vaccine coverage settings. In addition, we found that while an outbreak

311 may still occur in the absence of isolation in the community with low vaccination coverage,
312 the risk could be minimized when additional control measures such as contact tracing and
313 quarantine of their contacts, as well as testing, are implemented (**Figure 6**).

314

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