



HEALTH SAFETY

UPDATE

Omicron, a new SARS-CoV-2 variant, has been identified in many countries and categorized as a Variant of Concern by the U.S. government and the World Health Organization (WHO). Because little is known about Omicron currently, it is important for the public health and medical communities as well as the general public to remain vigilant to reduce potential exposure.

Background:

This new variant has a large number of mutations that can potentially increase infectivity and transmissibility. Currently, it is unknown how efficiently the Omicron variant can spread from person to person. It is unknown whether Omicron is more transmissible than other variants.

Currently, there is limited information about the Omicron variant and given the small numbers of identified cases attributed to the Omicron variant to date, current assessment of disease severity and response to vaccines and therapeutics is difficult. Preliminary information indicates that there are no unusual symptoms associated with Omicron variant infection, and some patients are asymptomatic. Symptom may be milder in persons who have been vaccinated or previously infected with SARS CoV-2.

Recommendations for the Public:

Prevention strategies include vaccination, masking, improving ventilation, distancing, handwashing, and testing to slow SARS-CoV-2 transmission. CDC recommends that **everyone** ages 2 years or older wear masks in public and indoor places. Unvaccinated people should wear masks regardless of community transmission level.

Masks are required in indoor areas of public transportation.

Persons who have a close contact with someone who has COVID-19, should get tested 5-7 days after exposure (even if they are asymptomatic) and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative. Persons who develop symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested and stay home until their test result is negative; persons who have a positive test result should isolate at home for 10 days.

Vaccination

Vaccination remains vital to COVID-19 pandemic control. The COVID-19 vaccines approved or authorized in the United States are highly effective at preventing severe disease and death from the Delta variant, which is currently the dominant variant circulating in the U.S. CDC recommends that everyone ages five and older should be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible. In addition, CDC recommends all persons age 18 years and older receive a booster dose at the recommended interval.

Breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated are expected, but vaccines are effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. Early evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people who become infected with the Omicron variant can spread the virus to others. Vaccines are expected to be effective against severe illness. The recent emergence of the Omicron variant further emphasizes the importance of vaccinations and boosters.