

Brief Summary of Omicron: What to do now

Omicron is a much more rapidly spreading variant of covid that has grown from first report on Nov 25 to a record global spike of cases that is already several times the level of Delta. It has 60 mutations, many more than previous variants, and undermines previous immunity so that the protection provided by both vaccination and prior infection is much reduced, especially for getting infected. Some antigen tests are also not as reliable for Omicron so that there are more false negatives than before. While it has widely been reported to be less severe it is not much less severe than Delta and the average severity is lower only because it infects many people that Delta would be less likely to infect—like the relatively shallow depth of a river flooding the river plain. The severity of Long Covid consequences is not yet known and may be either better or worse than previous variants. The US has gone from about 80,000 cases per day before Omicron to about 500,000 cases per day. The positivity in many places is so high, and the availability of tests is so poor, that we know that many more cases are happening that are not being reported.

Omicron spreads so rapidly in part because it causes large superspreader events that have been reported in many countries around the world. Many people are infected even when everyone was fully vaccinated and tested negative prior to the event. This includes outdoor events.

To protect yourself, your relatives, friends and colleagues from Omicron, start with the most important preventive measures: Avoid any non-essential gatherings, when you have to be near people wear a high quality mask such as N95, KN95, KF94, FFP2, double or elastomeric mask, maximize ventilation and HEPA purification, test on any symptoms or possible exposure and follow original guidelines for isolation and quarantine rather than reduced time requirements that the CDC introduced based upon assumption of vaccine effectiveness, i.e. 14 days, get vaccinated or boosted but remember that it takes time to be effective and has a reduced effectiveness against Omicron so should not be the only measure taken.

To minimize risks, it is recommended to take all possible precautions right now given the very large number of infections in the US. If at all possible, staying home from work and school, whether in remote learning or otherwise, is strongly advised. Many businesses have returned to work at home and universities to remote classes. A “shelter-in-place” strategy is best.

Summary:

* Covid is AIRBORNE. You can get infected in an empty elevator. Learn more about the transmission of SARS-CoV2 by [aerosols](#).

* Fully vaccinate everyone, ASAP.

* Use better masks, N95 for adults, KF94 for little kids, [information](#), [source](#)

Masks should:

- Completely cover the nose and mouth
- Fit snugly against the sides of the face and not have any gaps
- Be handled only by the ear loops, cords, or head straps (not by the surface of the mask)

* If masks are too expensive to discard, you can keep them individually in paper bags for at least 5 days and reuse them.

* Minimize contacts to bare minimum. Do not host.

* Shop online only.

* Remote learning if possible, try to keep as many kids at home as possible in the next two weeks.

* Try working from home. If you must work in person, minimize contact, maximize ventilation, buy a small HEPA filter and NEVER remove your mask in a closed space.

* Improve air quality in homes and workplaces by opening windows even a little, use air purifiers, and maintain and upgrade ventilation systems. Keep the humidity between 40 and 60%.

* In case of contact, try to get a drive by PCR test. DO NOT enter a testing site in a closed space. Isolate as much as you can.

* Keep supplies at home for two weeks, including prescription medicines if needed.