

Omicron Surge FAQs updated December 20, 2021

Information compiled by Jefferson County Public Health

What is Omicron?

Viruses constantly change through mutation and sometimes these mutations result in a new variant of the virus. Some variants emerge and disappear while others persist. New variants will continue to emerge. Omicron was designated as a variant of concern by the World Health Organization on November 26, 2021.

Taking steps to reduce the spread of infection, including getting a COVID-19 vaccine and booster, are the best way to slow the emergence of new variants.

[More info \(CDC\)...](#)

Why is Omicron concerning?

It spreads more easily than other variants, including Delta.

Does Omicron cause severe symptoms?

For people who are not yet vaccinated and have no history of prior infection, symptoms are likely to be similar to other COVID-19 variants.

Since Omicron spreads so easily, it will result in higher hospitalizations and deaths even if symptoms are generally not as severe, according to Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, a COVID-19 technical lead with World Health Organization.

Do vaccines protect against Omicron?

Current vaccines are expected to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths due to infection with the Omicron variant. However, breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated are likely to occur.

Everyone ages 16 and older who is at least six months past their second dose of Moderna/Pfizer or two months past their dose of J&J should receive a booster dose as soon as possible for best protection.

Does prior infection (a.k.a. “natural immunity”) protect me against Omicron?

Early reports suggest prior infection from another COVID-19 variant may not provide protection against infection from Omicron.

In a new Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report examining more than 7,000 people across 9 states who were hospitalized with COVID-like illness, CDC found that those who were unvaccinated and had a recent infection were 5 times more likely to have COVID-19 than those who were recently fully vaccinated and did not have a prior infection.

[More info \(CDC\)...](#)

Should I get a booster?

Recent data suggest vaccination becomes less effective over time, especially in people aged 65 years and older. That’s why receiving a booster dose can increase a person’s protection.

Everyone ages 16 and older who is at least six months past their second dose of Moderna/Pfizer or two months past their dose of J&J should receive a booster dose as soon as possible.

[More info \(CDC\)...](#)

Which booster should I get?

Jefferson County Public Health cannot recommend a specific product, only inform the public of their options. Moderna and Pfizer are authorized for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC now recommends a person choose the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines over Johnson & Johnson. This is because there is an increased but rare risk of blood clotting disorders associated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

[More info \(CDC\)...](#)

I received Johnson & Johnson as my first dose. Does a booster of Moderna/Pfizer provide adequate protection for me?

Yes, it does. Note the CDC now recommends choosing Moderna/Pfizer over J&J.

Where can I get a vaccination or booster in the Jefferson County region?

A list of locations is available on our website here:

<https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1529/COVID-19-Vaccine>

Is Omicron in Jefferson County?

It is very likely that Omicron is in Jefferson County.

The Washington State Department of Health does analyze a small number of positive PCR tests from around the state in order to see what variants may be circulating. However, that process takes weeks to complete. In other words, a newly published data report will show what variants were present when the samples were first collected, weeks in the past. To view the latest report from WA DOH, [click here](#).

Are any other public health orders on the horizon in response to Omicron surge?

At this time, there are no plans to issue any further public health orders in order to slow the spread of COVID-19.

However, things are constantly changing. Follow Jefferson County Public health on Facebook and Instagram, or keep visiting our website in order to stay up to date with any new information.

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, or you have been in close contact with an infectious person, you should take a test.

[More info \(JCPH\)...](#)

Why do I still need to wear a mask?

- COVID-19 case rates remain high.
 - For case rates in WA, [click here](#).
 - For case rates in Jefferson County, [click here](#).
- Research shows mask-wearing can reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus.
 - For more information, [click here](#).
- State and county laws require wearing masks in public, indoor spaces.
 - Order of the Washington State Secretary of Health, [click here](#).
 - Washington State Department of Labor and Industries requirements, [click here](#)
 - Jefferson County Health Order, [click here](#).

When will the public health order pertaining to restaurants and bars end?

When the COVID-19 case rate in Jefferson County falls below 75 cases per 100,000 and remains there for two weeks, the Jefferson County Health Officer will consider rescinding this health order.

For case rates in Jefferson County, [click here](#).

When will the pandemic end?

Experts predict COVID-19 will eventually transition out of a pandemic phase and into an endemic phase, similar to the flu. The timing of that transition depends on how many people have protection from the virus from vaccination or prior infection. We may also draw closer to that time with the availability of drugs used to treat COVID-19 infections.

For questions referencing possible mis and disinformation:

Know how to spot mis and disinformation with this checklist:

- Articles should have a byline and a publication date. Investigate to see if the author has the training and experience needed to understand the primary source material.
- Publishers should have a reputation for accurate and objective reporting. Their editorial process should ensure fact-checking and vetted sources.
- Articles should reference peer-reviewed scientific journals or studies conducted by reputable research institutions or universities. They should include citations or footnotes that document primary sources. (Be aware of potential bias in research commissioned by political lobbying groups or corporations.)
- The qualifications and affiliations of the experts cited in the article should be clear and relevant to the topic.
- Authors should not make sweeping claims or exaggerate risks or benefits.

Two independent fact-checking sources include <https://www.snopes.com> and <https://usafacts.org>.