An FAQ: What to Know About Omicron

What is Omicron?

Omicron is the latest coronavirus virus variant and the [dominant strain](#) in the United States. Highly transmissible, Omicron is rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases. While cases have surged, severe illness and deaths have stayed comparatively low, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The latest wave of the coronavirus pandemic may hit its peak in the U.S. by the end of January and turn around quickly.

What is the difference between the Delta and Omicron variants?

Research suggests that Omicron may cause less damage to the lungs, causing milder disease than previous versions of the coronavirus. For most people who are up to date on their COVID-19 vaccinations, Omicron results in mild illness that can resemble the common cold, another form of the coronavirus. Variants like Omicron are a natural part of the progression of the virus, and new variants will continue to emerge.

What are the symptoms of Omicron vs. Delta?

Based on symptoms alone, it's probably difficult to discern between Omicron and Delta. But there are some subtle symptom differences between the variants**.** Common symptoms of both variants include:

Omicron
- Mild cough
- Scratchy throat
- Fatigue or tiredness
- Congestion and runny nose

Delta
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Headache
- Fever
- Possible shortness of breath (especially in unvaccinated individuals)

Also, it is flu season and other viral and bacterial infections are circulating. Coronavirus and influenza co-infections ("flurona") are reported as the highly contagious Omicron variant surges. Know there are similarities and differences between [flu and COVID-19](#).

Will I be infected with Omicron?

Experts say that given the significant community spread, most people are likely to get infected with Omicron, even those who are vaccinated and boosted. While post-vaccinated infection is possible, COVID-19 vaccines have remained effective at protecting against severe disease, hospitalization, and death.

Who should get tested?

While testing is encouraged to evaluate COVID-19 symptoms, it may be difficult to obtain a test when there is a surge of cases in our region. During periods of extremely high demand and transmission, health officials are asking people to help avoid straining the health care system by limiting requests for testing to those who have more significant symptoms or are at risk for severe disease. When transmission rates are high, you can presume that symptoms are likely due to the SARS-CoV2 virus. Testing is unlikely to impact clinical management of people with mild illness. Most people with mild

illness resembling the common cold can recover at home. Follow the CDC's [isolation and quarantine](#) recommendations for the public. If symptoms persist or worsen, seek medical attention from your health care provider.

What should I do if I'm sick?

The CDC has updated [isolation and quarantine](#) recommendations for the public. If you are sick:
- Keep track of your symptoms.
- **If you have [an emergency warning sign](#) (including trouble breathing), call 911.**
- Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you or seek a [telehealth](#) visit.

How can I protect myself?

Vaccines remain the best public health measure to protect people from COVID-19, slow transmission, and reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death.

The CDC recommends these steps to reduce your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19:

- **Get a COVID-19 vaccine** as soon as you can when eligible. People 5 years old and over are currently eligible.
- **Wear** a mask over your nose and mouth.
- **Stay** at least 6 feet away from people who don't live with you.
- **Avoid** crowded areas and poorly ventilated spaces.
- **Wash** your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

For the most up-to-date news and information about the coronavirus pandemic, visit the **WHO** and **CDC** websites.

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