

Health officials identify omicron variant in Wisconsin

Posted on Monday, Dec 6, 2021

Health officials have identified the first known case of the omicron variant of COVID-19 in Wisconsin.

This strain of the virus was first identified last month in South Africa, and has since spread to dozens of countries. The CDC has classified it as a “variant of concern,” as it displays mutations associated with increased transmissibility and resistance to antibodies.

Still, officials caution that it could take several weeks before scientists determine exactly how the omicron variant differs from other strains of COVID-19, including the severity of disease in those who are infected.

“We’ve been prepared for this news and will continue trusting the science to help keep Wisconsinites and our communities healthy and safe,” Gov. Tony Evers said in a release. “Now is the time to double down on our efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, including the Omicron variant. I urge all eligible Wisconsinites to get vaccinated and receive a booster dose as soon as possible and to follow the latest public health guidance.”

The omicron case was confirmed in an adult male resident of Milwaukee County who recently returned from travelling to South Africa. The Department of Health Services says he was fully vaccinated and has received a booster dose. As of Saturday, he had mild symptoms and had not been hospitalized.

Meanwhile, DHS and the City of Milwaukee Health Department are investigating a COVID-19 outbreak associated with a wedding held Nov. 27 in Milwaukee. At least 12 positive cases of the virus have been found among California residents who attended the event, including five identified as the omicron variant according to findings from California health officials.

Wisconsin health officials have been conducting outreach to those in Wisconsin who may have been exposed, and they say that isolation and quarantine protocols are being followed. The one confirmed case of the omicron variant in Wisconsin is not associated with this outbreak.

“Although the news that this variant is continuing to spread throughout the country is concerning, it should not be a cause for panic,” DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake said. “We know COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing serious illness and death.”

See more from DHS on the omicron variant: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/news/releases/120421.htm>

-By Alex Moe