

PHMDC: Announces nearly 150 Omicron cases identified in Dane County

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Caution, Planning Strongly Urged Before Holiday Gatherings

Nearly 150 Omicron cases have been identified in Dane County as of December 21. This indicates rapid growth of Omicron from the initial three cases that were first identified five days ago on December 16. The number of Omicron cases is expected to continue rising quickly as more cases are sequenced.

Everyone should get vaccinated and boosted, monitor themselves carefully for symptoms, and get tested before gathering with others for the holidays, especially if gathering with people 65 or older, immunocompromised people, or people with chronic health conditions (like heart problems or diabetes).

“We’ve seen Omicron spread rapidly in other countries and states, so this isn’t a surprise,” said Janel Heinrich, Director of Public Health Madison & Dane County. “We will likely see rapid spread of Omicron in Dane County in the coming days and weeks. We all need to be prepared and take action now so that we can preserve our hospital capacity and prevent severe outcomes.”

Because Omicron spreads so easily, activities like gathering indoors now bring a greater risk of catching COVID than before. We urge everyone to take necessary precautions so everyone can have a healthy and safe holiday season.

If you are gathering for the winter holidays, take the following action steps:

- **Test yourself before a gathering.** If you get a test at a community site, stay home as much as possible after getting swabbed and do not expose yourself further until after the gathering. If using an at home rapid test, test yourself as soon as possible before the gathering. Even if a test comes back negative, continue to monitor your symptoms up until the gathering and stay home if you develop any symptoms.
- **Stay home if you are sick, even if symptoms are very mild.** Mild symptoms may include a runny nose, headache, fatigue, or cough. Even if COVID is mild for you, it might not be mild for your family or friends.
- **Keep gatherings small and short.** Open windows to increase ventilation or consider having gatherings outside. Wear a mask if you are in an indoor crowded or public space. Limit other activities that might expose you to COVID and get sick or spread it to more vulnerable family and friends.
- **Take extra precautions when gathering with people 65 or older, people who are immunocompromised (i.e. have cancer), and people with chronic health conditions.** These are the people who are most at risk for severe COVID, even if they are vaccinated. You should skip unnecessary activities beforehand, like going to a bar or restaurant, where you could be exposed before seeing them. Consider masking up around them and spreading out. We know this isn't ideal, but to keep our loved ones healthy and safe, it's important to not add on to their risk during the holidays.
- **Get vaccinated and boosted.** While it is too late to receive the full effects of the vaccine or booster before Christmas, getting boosted or vaccinated now will give you some protection and will be vital as Omicron spreads rapidly.