Public Health Madison & Dane County: Omicron variant in Dane County: Pay attention, don't panic

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The Omicron variant has been detected in Dane County. Public Health Madison & Dane County is encouraging everyone to get vaccinated against COVID-19, or get a booster if they're eligible.

"As we work to learn more about the Omicron variant, including how easily it spreads, remember that the best protection against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant is for people ages 5 and older to get vaccinated," said Janel Heinrich, Director of Public Health Madison & Dane County. "For those who are already vaccinated, this is the best time to bolster your immunity with a booster dose as soon as possible. Vaccination greatly reduces risk of severe illness or death."

On November 26, 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated the Omicron variant as a Variant of Concern, a classification indicating the variant has the potential for being more contagious, causing more severe illness, or decreased effectiveness of vaccines or treatments. Scientists are currently working to find evidence of any of these factors being the case with Omicron.

"It will take time before scientists know the full picture of how easily Omicron spreads, if it results in more severe infection, and how vaccines hold up," said COVID-19 data team lead Katarina Grande. "However, even if some existing vaccines turn out to be less effective against Omicron infection, it's important to remember vaccine-induced immunity isn't an on-and-off switch, they will still provide some protection, making it vitally important to get vaccinated and get a booster."

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), the state of Wisconsin is seeing some of the highest case counts in the country, with more than half of the state's hospitals currently operating at overall peak capacity.

"Our hospital systems are becoming overwhelmed by the sheer number of patients they are seeing come through their doors," said Heinrich. "Don't hesitate, take advantage of one of the many options to get vaccinated, at our Arena clinic at the Alliant Energy Center, at our two permanent clinics at East Washington or South Madison, or at one of the dozens of sites listed on vaccines.gov."

For more information about the COVID-19 in Dane County or to make a vaccine appointment, visit publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus. You can also follow @publichealthmdc on Facebook , Twitter , and Instagram.