

Omicron Variant Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What do we know about vaccines and this new variant?

A: We have learned that those who are fully vaccinated (two shots of Pfizer or Moderna or one shot of Johnson & Johnson) have just a 30% immunity to omicron. Those who are fully vaccinated and boosted have a 75% immunity. This is highly transmissible, and everyone is at risk of infection.

Q: Is it true that omicron only causes mild symptoms?

A: It is true that omicron seems to cause mild symptoms in many of those who are vaccinated. However, it can cause severe illness in the immunocompromised and the unvaccinated. A vaccinated person with mild (or no) symptoms can pass omicron on to these vulnerable populations.

Q: What can we do now to protect ourselves from the omicron variant?

A: If it is possible for you to stay home and away from public places, please do so. If you must go to a public place, wear an N-95 mask (cloth masks are not considered effective against omicron).

Vaccination continues to be an important weapon to reduce your risk of infection:

1. If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated now.
2. If you are fully vaccinated, get a vaccine booster.
3. Make sure all household members who are eligible for vaccination are fully vaccinated and boosted.

Q: If I had the Pfizer vaccine, can I be boosted with Moderna (and vice versa)?

A: Yes, it is acceptable to “mix and match” vaccine types with the booster shot. What is important is to get a booster shot.

Q: What about vaccine side effects?

A: Adults and children may have some side effects from the vaccine, which are normal signs that their body is building protection. These side effects may affect their ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Some people have no side effects, and allergic reactions are rare. Serious side effects that could cause a long-term health problem are extremely unlikely following any vaccination, including COVID-19 vaccination.

Q: What additional precautions can we take?

A: Do not go to crowded places indoors and outdoors. If you cannot avoid crowds, wear an N-95 mask (covering your nose and mouth) in crowded places indoors and outdoors. If you are indoors with people who are not in your immediate household, wear a mask and observe social distancing.

Q: What about gatherings for the New Year?

A: Gatherings are not a good idea at this time. If you are sick or have symptoms, don't host or attend a gathering. Testing can give you information about your risk of spreading COVID-19. Use a self-test before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household, and ask others to self-test as well:

- A positive self-test result means that you have an infection and should avoid indoor gatherings to reduce the risk of spreading disease to someone else.
- A negative self-test result means that you may not have an infection. Repeating the test with at least 24 hours between tests will increase the confidence that you are not infected.

Q. What about travel?

A. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that only vaccinated people should travel at this time (unvaccinated people should not travel at this time). Be aware of any testing requirements before you depart and before you return. Follow all masking and social distancing recommendations on airplanes, trains, busses, or any form of public transportation.

Q: This is the second year we have had these concerns and surging infections at the Holidays. Is COVID-19 ending anytime soon?

A: It's not ending anytime soon, but there will be a slow down at some point. Here in the U.S., we have pockets of unvaccinated people where COVID-19 can spread. We know the omicron variant, in particular, is highly transmissible and can grow to higher concentrations within unvaccinated hosts. Only time will tell how this plays out.