

January 2022 Vaccination Update

COVID-19 Update: The Omicron Variant

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed the first case of the Omicron variant in the United States by the California and San Francisco Departments of Public Health on December 1st. The individual was a traveler who returned from South Africa on November 22, 2021, where the variant was first identified. There is little known about Omicron, but it is believed to spread more easily than the original virus and the Delta variant. The CDC is reporting that “anyone with Omicron infection can spread the virus to others, even if they are vaccinated or don’t have symptoms.”

Omicron has become the dominant strain of COVID-19 throughout King County, according to Harborview Medical Center's Medical Director for Infection Prevention and Control, [Dr. John Lynch](#). "We're going to see it replace the delta strain in eastern Washington and north and south Washington here very soon," said Lynch. "It moves incredibly quickly and it's just a matter of days to weeks before that's the case."

The World Health Organization continues to [recommend](#) that individuals can best reduce the spread of COVID-19 by maintaining physical distance, wearing a well-fitting mask, opening windows to improve ventilation, avoiding crowded spaces, keeping hands clean, coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue, and getting vaccinated when it is their turn. Everyone 5 years and older is eligible to be vaccinated in the United States.

Vaccine Booster Shots

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) will include race and ethnicity data in its COVID-19 reporting and add new metrics regarding children’s vaccines and booster shots. Until now, race and ethnicity data for COVID-19 cases has been provided by public health investigators using patient interviews or medical records. Going forward, DOH will use the race and ethnicity data submitted in lab reports for the statewide COVID-19 dashboard.

The COVID-19 vaccines continue to protect people from severe illness and death from the virus. Recently, the FDA expanded approval of [boosters](#) for those between 12 and 15. Booster shots increase the strength and duration of the vaccine’s protection and are especially important for adults over 50 and people with medical conditions. Booster shots are appropriate six months after the second dose of Moderna or Pfizer vaccines and two months after the initial dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Currently, 76% of Washington state’s population is fully vaccinated and 82% of those 12 years-old and over have received at least one dose. Recent studies show people are having different reactions to the Omicron variant. According to [Kaiser Family](#)

[Foundation COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#), the threat is encouraging more vaccinated adults to get a booster shot. Half of vaccinated adults surveyed say it is **more likely** that they will get a booster dose. But it appears to have the opposite effect for those who are unvaccinated. For 87% of unvaccinated adults, the news of the Omicron variant **does not** make them more likely to get vaccinated.

Those seeking a booster can call their doctor's office, pharmacy, or health care provider, or use Washington state's [Vaccine Locator](#) or call 833-VAX-HELP.