



COVID-19

What You Need to Know About Variants

Updated Apr. 26, 2022

Omicron Spread

CDC is monitoring the current surge of COVID-19 cases. Learn more about the Omicron variant and its expected impact on hospitalizations.

[Omicron Variant](#)

[Hospitalization Forecast](#)

What You Need to Know

- New variants of the virus are expected to occur.
- Slowing the spread of the virus, by [protecting yourself and others](#), can help slow the emergence of new variants.
- The Omicron variant causes more infections and spreads faster than the original [SARS-CoV-2](#) strain of the virus that causes COVID-19.
- CDC is working with state and local public health officials to [monitor the spread of all variants, including Omicron](#).
- Getting a [vaccine](#) reduces your risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. [Staying up to date on your COVID-19 vaccines](#), which includes getting a booster when eligible, further improves your protection.

Variants Are Expected

Viruses constantly change through mutation and sometimes these mutations result in a new variant of the virus. Some variants emerge and disappear while others persist. New variants will continue to emerge. CDC and other public health organizations monitor all variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 in the United States and globally.

Scientists monitor all variants but may classify certain ones as [variants being monitored](#), [variants of interest](#), [variants of concern](#) and [variants of high consequence](#). Some variants spread more easily and quickly than other variants, which may lead to more cases of COVID-19. Even if a variant causes less severe disease in general, an increase in the overall number of cases could cause an increase in hospitalizations, put more strain on healthcare resources and potentially lead to more deaths.

Variants of Concern



Omicron - B.1.1.529, BA.1, BA.1.1, BA.2, BA.3, BA.4 and BA.5

First identified: South Africa

Spread: Spreads more easily than other variants. CDC is working with state and local public health officials to [monitor the spread of Omicron](#).

Symptoms: Please refer to [Symptoms of COVID-19 | CDC](#)

Severe illness and death: Data suggest that Omicron is less severe in general. However, a surge in cases may lead to significant increases in hospitalization and death. More data are needed to fully understand the severity of illness and death associated with this variant.

Vaccine: [Breakthrough infections](#) in people who are vaccinated are expected, but being up to date on recommended vaccines is effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. The emergence of the Omicron variant further emphasizes the importance of vaccination and boosters.

Treatments: Some, but not all, [monoclonal antibody treatments](#) remain effective against Omicron. Public health agencies work with healthcare providers to ensure that effective treatments are used appropriately to treat patients.

[Learn more about the Omicron variant](#)

We Have the Tools to Fight COVID-19



Vaccines

- [Vaccines](#) reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19.
- [People who are up to date on vaccines](#), including booster doses when eligible are likely to have stronger protection against COVID-19 variants, including Omicron. CDC recommends everyone eligible get vaccinated and a booster shot.



Masks

When to wear a mask

- Wear a [well-fitting mask](#) with the best fit, protection, and comfort for you.
- If you are in an area with a high [COVID-19 Community Level](#) and are ages 2 or older, wear a [well-fitting mask](#) indoors in public.
- If you are sick and need to be around others, or are caring for someone who has COVID-19, wear a mask.
- If you are at increased risk for severe illness, or live with or spend time with someone at higher risk, speak to your healthcare provider about wearing a mask at medium COVID-19 Community Levels.



Testing

- [Tests](#) for COVID-19 tell you [if you have an infection](#) at the time of the test. This type of test is called a “viral” test because it looks for viral infection. Antigen or [Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests \(NAATs\)](#) are viral tests.
 - Additional tests would be needed to determine which variant caused your infection, but these typically are not authorized for public use.
- As new variants emerge, scientists will continue to evaluate how well tests detect current infection.
- Self-tests may be used if you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been exposed or potentially exposed to an individual with COVID-19.
 - Even if you don’t have symptoms and have not been exposed to an individual with COVID-19, using a self-test before gathering indoors with others can give you information about the risk of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.

Related Pages

- › [Omicron Variant](#)
- › [Variant Proportions](#)
- › [SARS-CoV-2 Sequences](#)
- › [Symptoms of COVID-19](#)

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