

# COVID-19 Omicron Variant: What Community Members Need to Know

COVID-19 cases are rising in some Native communities due to a new variant of the virus called the Omicron variant.

- **The Omicron variant spreads much more easily and quickly.**
- People who have received a **booster vaccine** are well protected against severe disease.
- Unvaccinated people are at high risk of getting sick.
- People who have received a vaccine but not a booster dose are at high risk of breakthrough infection.
- **Getting a booster dose, wearing a mask, keeping 6 feet of distance, getting tested, and avoiding large indoor gatherings are the best ways to protect yourself and your community.**



## How contagious is the Omicron variant?

The Omicron variant is much more contagious and spreads much faster than earlier variants.

Omicron is now the dominant COVID-19 variant in the US just four weeks after doctors first detected the variant in the country. By comparison, it took the Delta variant four months to become the dominant variant in the US after first arriving in March 2021.

Like earlier variants, Omicron spreads person to person through airborne germs. The best way to protect yourself from germs is to wear a well fitted mask.

## Does Omicron cause less severe illness?

There isn't enough evidence to know for sure yet. Omicron causes symptoms similar to previous variants, including cough, tiredness, congestion, runny nose, headache, sore throat, sneezing, muscle ache, and loss of taste and smell. More severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, chest pain, and new confusion are still being reported with Omicron.

## Am I at risk of getting sick from the Omicron variant?

People who have not been vaccinated are at very high risk of getting sick from Omicron, even if they have had a prior COVID-19 infection.

People who have been fully vaccinated but are past due for a booster shot (6 months after full vaccination for Pfizer and Moderna, 2 months for Johnson & Johnson) are at high risk of a breakthrough infection, though they will be less likely to experience hospitalization or death.

Wearing a well fitted mask in public places helps prevent the spread of Omicron. If you feel sick, get tested as soon as possible.

### STOP OMICRON

1. Get a vaccine booster
2. Wear a mask in public places
3. Keep 6 feet of distance
4. Avoid crowded spaces
5. Get tested if sick

## How effective are vaccines against Omicron?

COVID-19 vaccines are effective against Omicron. Protection from the vaccines declines over time but booster doses can restore protection. Booster doses are recommended 6 months after a second dose of Pfizer or Moderna and 2 months after one dose of Johnson & Johnson. Vaccination, and booster doses when eligible, will help protect people from severe COVID-19 disease.