

FACT

The Facts on the Omicron Variant

The Omicron variant developed from mutations of the SARS COV-2 virus and was first detected in specimens collected in Botswana and South Africa. On November 26, 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) named it Omicron and classified it as a Variant of Concern. The first confirmed U.S. case of Omicron was identified on December 1, and it has since become the dominant strain of coronavirus in the U.S. and worldwide. Here are the facts you need to know about Omicron and how you can keep yourself and your loved ones safe.

FACT: The Omicron variant spreads easier than the original COVID-19 virus.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Omicron variant likely spreads more easily than the original COVID-19 virus. On December 20, the CDC reported the Omicron variant is the most dominant strain in the U.S., accounting for over 73% of new coronavirus cases less than three weeks after the first was reported. Ochsner is working closely with Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) to sequence samples of positive COVID-19 cases in our area. This data is key to understanding what strains of the virus are present in our community and across the state.

FACT: Breakthrough cases of Omicron can occur, but vaccination remains critically important.

As with other variants, breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated can occur. As with other variants, like Delta, current vaccines are expected to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations and deaths due to infection with the Omicron variant. The emergence of Omicron further emphasizes the importance of vaccination and boosters.

FACT: Getting vaccinated and boosted is the best way to protect yourself and others.

Omicron displays how variants can mutate rapidly amid low vaccination rates, which underscores the importance of getting vaccinated and getting a booster. On December 8, Pfizer released preliminary data from an initial laboratory study demonstrating that three doses of the Pfizer vaccine (the original two dose regiment plus a booster dose) neutralizes the Omicron variant. Ochsner Health continues to strongly encourage all eligible individuals ages 5 and up to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and everyone 16 and over to receive the booster shot to protect yourself and those around you.

FACT: Recommitting to mitigation factors is also important to slowing the spread of Omicron.

As the Omicron variant has proven to be more contagious and is spreading rapidly throughout Louisiana and Mississippi, fully vaccinated individuals should continue to protect themselves and others by recommitting to social distancing and other mitigation measures. This includes practicing good hand hygiene, wearing face masks, social distancing in public gatherings, coughing or sneezing into your elbow or a tissue, and staying home if you experience symptoms. Avoiding large gatherings completely will further reduce your risk.

FACT: Plan ahead and exercise caution if you intend to travel.

If you plan to travel, make sure to check the current COVID-19 situation at your intended destination. The CDC also recommends delaying travel until you are fully vaccinated. If you plan to travel by air, check if your airline requires any testing or vaccination status. With the emergence of the new Omicron variant, policies might be shifting so even if you checked when you booked, it's important to recheck before your trip what policies are in place - both for your flight and destination.

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Schedule your vaccination appointment on the MyOchsner portal today. Visit ochsner.org/vaccine for more facts, or call **844-888-2772** with any additional questions. For more COVID-19 information and resources, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov) or the Louisiana Department of Health (ldh.la.gov) website.

