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To: All Wisconsinites

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Public Health Advisory: Anticipated Surge in COVID-19 Disease Activity due to Omicron Variant

Wisconsin Residents Should Take Urgent Action to Prevent Hospitalizations and Deaths

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The highly contagious Omicron Variant of COVID-19 has been detected in Wisconsin and is anticipated to cause a rapid increase in disease activity in the coming weeks. Public health officials are actively researching how Omicron differs from other variants. Current data from other states and regions of the world show that it spreads more easily than previous strains, including the Delta variant. There is a serious risk that continued, increased numbers of COVID-19 cases will overwhelm an already strained health care system, leading to dangerous situations where patients experiencing medical emergencies may not be able to receive immediate, adequate, life-saving attention and care due to lack of hospital capacity.

Taking action to prevent or minimize the impending surge in hospitalizations and deaths is the responsibility of all Wisconsinites. We can all do our part to slow the spread of Omicron by collectively taking several simple actions. These include:

- Getting vaccinated for COVID-19, including a booster dose as soon as you are eligible.
- Wearing a well-fitting mask in indoor spaces when others are present who do not live with you.
- Celebrating safely over the holidays by keeping gatherings small, getting tested before visiting others, and staying home if you test positive or have any symptoms.

Further information regarding the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) recommendations to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is outlined below. All Wisconsinites should follow these actions to protect themselves, and those most vulnerable in our communities, against COVID-19. We all have a critical role to play in stopping the spread of COVID-19. For more information about how to stay protected and stop the spread of COVID-19, call 211, or contact your local health department.

Get vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination remains essential to protecting your health and slowing the spread of COVID-19. While cases of the Omicron variant are growing, the overwhelming majority of COVID-19 infections in Wisconsin are still being caused by the Delta variant. The authorized COVID-19 vaccines remain highly effective at preventing severe disease and death from

Delta. Evidence also suggests that fully boosted people are protected against serious illness and hospitalization from Omicron. Everyone ages five and older is eligible to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Boosters are also available for everyone ages 16 and older. If you need help finding a vaccine, visit:

- [COVID-19: Find a Vaccine Appointment \(Wisconsin Department of Health Services\)](#)
- [Vaccines.gov – Find COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [Covid-19 Vaccination Special Event directory provided by 211 Wisconsin](#)

Wear a mask. [Mask wearing](#) is advised for everyone ages two and older at indoor gatherings, regardless of vaccination status. Given high rates of COVID-19 transmission currently occurring in all 72 counties, and given the emerging evidence that the Omicron variant is more contagious than the Delta variant, DHS advises that everyone should wear a well-fitting mask in all public indoor settings. Masks continue to be an [effective strategy](#) to prevent COVID-19 infection.

Get tested for COVID-19. Anyone with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested, regardless of their vaccination status. If you are exposed to COVID-19, get tested five to seven days after exposure. If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, stay home while you are waiting for your results. Trusted testing partners include health care providers, [local health departments](#), and [community testing sites](#). [At-home COVID-19 tests](#) can also be used before gathering with family and friends. DHS currently provides free at-home collection kits, a type of at-home test, for all Wisconsinites.

DHS also recommends that everyone continue to complete the appropriate [quarantine](#) or [isolation](#) guidance after being exposed to, or diagnosed with COVID-19. Due to the large numbers of cases, not everyone who has COVID-19 or is exposed will get a call from public health. Individuals can assist public health efforts by informing their close contacts who were exposed to COVID-19.

Special considerations for holiday gatherings. To prevent the spread of disease, gatherings outside of your immediate household should remain small. It is important for individuals to know whether they have an active COVID-19 infection before gathering. Consider getting tested before spending time with others outside of your household. Gatherings should also occur in well ventilated spaces and are always safer outdoors.

People who are immunocompromised should wear a mask, and take additional precautions like getting tested for COVID-19 before a gathering. Everyone should wear a well-fitting mask if you are celebrating with someone who has a weakened immune system, is at an increased risk of severe disease, or is unvaccinated. Getting tested for COVID-19 before gathering with groups from different households, including [if you are traveling](#), can reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 to friends and family.