

Dr. Josh Omicron - FAQ

The following information represents the professional opinion of Dr. Joshua Schwarzbaum based on information known as of December 22, 2021. Due to the nature of this information, it is subject to change based on new data and/or research that becomes available. We encourage associates to speak with their personal healthcare provider for medical advice regarding their specific situation.

What is the Omicron variant?

The Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 was first identified in Southern Africa during November 2021. It was then declared a variant of concern by the World Health Organization. It has a large number of mutations on the spike protein which has increased its transmissibility and ability to cause reinfections.

Why is it called Omicron?

Omicron is the 15th letter in the Greek alphabet. The World Health Organization is using the Greek alphabet to make it easier and more practical for nonscientific communities to discuss the variants.

How does it spread?

The Omicron variant spreads in the same manner as the original COVID-19. Transmission occurs through the air, droplets (from coughing, sneezing, mucus), touching eyes, noses, or mouths of infected individuals, and surfaces.

Are symptoms associated with Omicron different from other variants?

The symptoms of Omicron are similar to other variants. If you do get infected, there is not a way to tell which strain of COVID-19 it is by symptoms alone. People commonly report fatigue, night sweats, body aches, headaches, fever and scratchy throat. A full list of symptoms include: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

Are people who are not vaccinated more at risk for getting COVID-19 and the Omicron variant?

People who are not vaccinated are certainly more at risk for getting COVID-19 and the Omicron variant. Numerous studies show how vaccines help prevent serious illness and death.

Will my vaccination protect me against the variant?

On Friday December 10th, the UK Health Security Agency released a comprehensive report in which they compared 56,439 cases of Delta to 581 cases of Omicron from November 27th to December 6th, 2021. Vaccine effectiveness against Omicron infection was 30-40% after two shots of Pfizer. After a booster, effectiveness increased to 70-80%.

Will getting my COVID-19 booster protect me against the Omicron variant?

Yes — see previous answer. Getting a booster greatly enhances your immunity and protection against the Omicron variant.

How do I keep myself safe from the Omicron variant?

Prevention is always the best way to keep yourself safe. Know where you're going and who you're hanging out with. Vaccines, masks, washing hands and keeping distance are the tried and true methods. Additionally, transmission can increase in places with large crowds and poor ventilation.

I have a child under 12 that is eligible for the vaccine, would you recommend vaccination for a young child?

I would recommend the vaccine for a child under 12. We are seeing cases spread around schools, and the younger-aged population. Having your children vaccinated can help prevent spread within your family and help prevent them from serious illness or death. Preliminary research from South Africa shows that children are more likely to be hospitalized due to the Omicron variant compared to previous variants.