



Media Release

For immediate release: January 7, 2022

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Omicron Variant: Significant Increase in COVID-19 Disease Activity

Yakima, WA- The Yakima Health District (YHD) continues to monitor COVID-19 disease activity throughout the county closely. The current situation related to COVID-19 is very different from just a few weeks ago. For reference, on December 23, 2021, Yakima County reported a case rate of 155 per 100,000 over 14 days. On January 7, 2022, Yakima County reported a case rate of 1,108 per 100,000 over 14 days. The case rate, in just two weeks, has more than quadrupled to a level that we have not seen before during the entire pandemic.

This recent increase of COVID-19 cases in Yakima County is likely related to recent holidays, gatherings, and related travel. At the same time, the state of Washington is seeing the Omicron variant emerge as the dominant strain. Data demonstrates that the variant has milder symptoms in most individuals, but it is also many times more infectious than previous variants of COVID-19. Even if most infections are mild, a highly transmissible variant could result in enough cases to impact staffing levels across all sectors of business and overwhelm the healthcare system. Of the COVID-19 cases, a small percentage of cases will be severe enough to require hospitalization. A small percent of a large number of cases will overwhelm the healthcare system. In Yakima County, prior waves of COVID-19 with less disease activity than anticipated with this surge, have already overwhelmed the healthcare system.

Increase in COVID-19 Testing

In Yakima County there is an increase of individuals seeking testing at the community-based testing sites. Anyone who is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or has been in close contact with someone positive with COVID-19 should get tested. At-home rapid tests are most effective when

individuals are symptomatic, and if taken frequently after a known exposure. If symptoms are present and the at-home rapid test result is negative, individuals should get a PCR test to confirm their result or repeat the at-home rapid test 2-3 days later. Rapid tests and PCR testing **should not** be sought at hospitals. Individuals are encouraged to visit www.YakimaTesting.org for a testing location near them or call 2-1-1.

Low Vaccination Coverage in Yakima County

The Yakima Health District continues to strongly encourage residents to protect themselves by getting a COVID-19 vaccine and booster dose if eligible. As of January 3, 2022, 53.9% of Yakima County residents have been fully vaccinated, and 60.2% have initiated vaccination. 20% of the eligible population has received a booster dose.

In Yakima County, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to be more common among unvaccinated individuals than in fully vaccinated individuals. To date, 91% of COVID-19 cases and 86% of COVID-19 hospitalizations in Yakima County have been among unvaccinated residents. According to a recent [report from the Washington State Department of Health](#), 60% of COVID-19 re-infections that have occurred in Washington State since September 2021 have been among unvaccinated individuals.

As COVID-19 cases rise, breakthrough cases are also expected to increase. Fully vaccinated individuals, especially those who are 50 and older and have [underlying medical conditions](#), are strongly urged to receive a booster dose to obtain additional protection against infection. Since individuals infected with the Omicron variant may experience mild symptoms, everyone should also continue to follow all public health recommendations regardless of vaccination status.

Public Health Recommendations

1. Stay home if sick and if individuals experience COVID-19 symptoms, get tested.
 - a. If using rapid at-home test kits, report a positive result using [WA Notify](#) and by calling 1-800-525-1027.
2. Stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccine series and get the booster, if [eligible](#).
3. Wear a well-fitting mask like a surgical mask or a cloth mask with a surgical mask over it anytime when in public.
4. When gathering, seek opportunities with increased ventilation such as outdoors or with open windows.
5. If individuals test positive, immediately isolate from members of their household. When entire households get sick with COVID-19 at the same time, it is extremely difficult for daily tasks to be completed. For more information visit the [CDC: Caring For Someone At Home](#).

Quotes

“The vaccines remain safe, and coupled with the booster, are protective against both Delta and the new Omicron variant. After receiving the booster, you are much less likely to experience severe infection, hospitalization, and death, even if you contract the Omicron variant. We still urge the community to utilize all the preventative measures available to remain safe. Get vaccinated or if already vaccinated, get boosted as soon as you can. Visit www.YakimaVaccines.org for a location near you or call 2-1-1.” -Dr. Neil Barg, Health Officer, Yakima Health District

“If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 it is important to get tested. If you test positive and there are others in your household, immediately isolate to avoid infecting the rest of your family. It is very difficult to get groceries, prepare food, or do other routine tasks for others, if the entire family is infected at once.” -Melissa Sixberry, BSN, RN, Director of Disease Control, Yakima Health District

Additional Information:

www.YakimaVaccines.org

www.YakimaTesting.org

[WA Notify](#)

[CDC: COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Shots](#)

[CDC: Quarantine and Isolation](#)

[CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions](#)

[WA DOH Newsroom: New report tracks risk of COVID-19 reinfection in Washington state](#)

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