



**NEVADA
HEALTH
RESPONSE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 16, 2021

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COVID-19 Press Bulletin for December 16, 2021

Carson City, NV — Today, Cassius Lockett, PhD, Director of Disease Surveillance and Control for the Southern Nevada Health District, State Epidemiologist Melissa Peek-Bullock and Karissa Loper, Health Bureau Chief provided updates on the State's COVID-19 response during a teleconference with members of the media.

This bulletin provides facts, figures and informational items from the call. As a reminder, data is provided in a dashboard on the home page of the [Nevada Health Response](#) website.

SUMMARY:

OMICRON VARIANT:

- On Dec. 14, the Southern Nevada Health District confirmed the state's first reported case of COVID-19 caused by the Omicron variant.
- The Southern Nevada Public Health Laboratory tested the specimen and continues to provide genome sequencing for positive COVID-19 cases to determine the presence of variants in the community.
- The individual who tested positive is a fully vaccinated female in her mid-20s who did not receive a booster dose of the vaccine.
- The individual traveled out of the country during the incubation period.
- Upon return she had symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- She is not hospitalized and is isolating.

- Part of the Health District's investigation includes identifying contacts of the case and making the appropriate recommendations for testing and quarantine.
- It was not unexpected that the variant would be identified in Southern Nevada.
- This case was identified as part of the Health District's surveillance process and serves as notice that the Omicron variant is in the community.
- It is important that people continue to protect themselves, their families and those around them by getting fully vaccinated, getting boosters if they are eligible, wearing masks in public indoor spaces, and staying home and getting tested if they are sick.
- To date, the Omicron variant has been detected in 63 countries and at least 30 U.S. states, including Nevada.
- Omicron will likely become the most common variant both in the U.S. and abroad.
- Omicron now accounts for 3% of all U.S. cases up from 0.5% from the previous week.
- Experts aren't sure what factors are driving the variant's rapid spread or when it might become dominant in the U.S. but have a clearer picture should be available later this month.
- What's encouraging is that vaccines will likely still protect against severe illness from Omicron, even though Omicron may infect vaccinated people more easily than other variants.
- Some reports suggest that Omicron may cause milder illness than other COVID variants.
- Early data from South Africa suggest hospitalization risk could be 29% lower for people with Omicron compared to early in the pandemic, and that people who were hospitalized had a 67% shorter hospital stay compared to the 18-month average.
- Data is not yet conclusive since many early cases were in young or vaccinated people.

- Even if Omicron does result in milder illness on average, a surge in cases can put pressure on health systems.
- Once you're fully vaccinated, getting recommended boosters is the best way to add protection.
- A Pfizer booster can more than double efficacy by boosting antibodies that target Omicron.

HOLIDAYS:

- As people spend more time with friends and family this holiday season, and with the announcement of the Omicron variant in Nevada, it is important that Nevadans do all we can to minimize the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19 while celebrating.
- The State continues to encourage vaccination for all those who are eligible and, if it has been 6 months since you received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or 2 months since you received the Johnson & Johnson shot, you can get a booster dose.
- The mitigation measures discussed throughout the State's COVID-19 response remain true as our community faces the Omicron variant and look toward the holiday season.
 - Get vaccinated or received your booster dose as soon as you are able;
 - Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth when you gather with people outside your household;
 - Maintain social distancing and avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces;
 - Wash your hands often;
 - Also, get tested for COVID-19 to prevent the spread to others.
- If you're traveling for the holidays, please consult the latest guidance.
- The CDC recently updated travel requirements for international travelers and air passengers, regardless of vaccination status, you must show a negative COVID-19 test taken no more than 1 day before travel to the United States.

- The State encourages all Nevadans to review local and state health departments of their destination before traveling to understand restrictions and requirements and follow the mitigation measures of hand washing, social distancing and mask wearing both while traveling and when you reach your final destination.
- At this time, post-Thanksgiving COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are lower than last year, likely due to widespread vaccination.
- In 2020, Thanksgiving coincided with Nevada's ongoing winter surge. Cases and hospitalizations reached an all-time high about 2 weeks after the holiday.
- This year in Nevada, COVID-19 cases are now almost five-times lower than last year, but cases did increase 8% over the past 2 weeks.
- If you haven't been vaccinated, make a plan to start the vaccine series and all Nevadans should follow the mitigation measures when gathering with friends and family.

ONE-YEAR OF VACCINE

- Earlier this week, the State reached the one-year milestone of COVID-19 vaccination.
- From Nevada's first allocation of just 17,550 doses available to the State's frontline health care workers through now when more than 1.8 million Nevadans have received at least one dose of vaccine.
- Almost 30,000 children ages 5 through 11 years have been vaccinated and more than 431,000 Nevadans have received a booster or third dose of COVID vaccine.
- In just the past 10 days almost 62,000 booster and third doses have been administered.
- Nevada's progress throughout the year could not be accomplished without the amazing partnerships all around the State.
- Local Health Authorities have been involved every step of the way, Nevada counties are a vital partner in Nevada's rural and frontier communities and so many organizations, community groups, faith leaders and others have joined the effort to protect the health of Nevadans.

- Early on, the State knew it would take a major effort to ensure the COVID vaccines reached every corner of our state, but the relationships built have exceeded expectations.
- The State has joined with new partners and received offers of support and assistance from Nevada's business community.
- Thank you to everyone who has offered help, resources, ideas and support in vaccinating the communities.
- While there have been bumps in the road, so much has been accomplished. The State continues to work every day to ensure the COVID vaccine is available to everyone – when and where they are ready to be vaccinated.

PROTECT NEVADA'S FUTURES

- This week, the State launched the Protect Nevada's Future campaign, focusing on Nevadans 5 to 11 years old.
- The statewide event is taking place December 18 - 23 and pharmacies, pop-up clinics, and providers throughout the state will be offering Pfizer's 5-to-11-year-old COVID-19 vaccine.
- Each site will also provide vaccine information for parents and caregivers to make sure their questions are answered, and they feel confident moving forward with vaccinating their children.
- This year more families and communities are gathering in person for the holidays, and with another virus variant circulating, this proactive effort to vaccinate the younger population of Nevadans is important to preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- Clinical trials found that the vaccine has a 90.9% efficacy rate in preventing COVID-19 in kids 5-11 and side effects were found to be very mild.
- Vaccinating kids protects them and further safeguards members of the community who cannot get vaccinated because they are immunocompromised or too young.
- To find a vaccine site for kids ages 5 to 11 years, visit NVCOVIDFighter.org or call 800-401-0946.

- The digital toolkit for Protect Nevada's Future is available here:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rZyEp6yBQPhz7TfhGmMKo37lwyX4gPWu?usp=sharing>

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