

Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Omicron Variant: Information for Residents of Correctional Facilities

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This FAQ is specifically about Omicron. For more information about COVID-19, see <https://amend.us/covid/>. Information about COVID-19 is changing constantly; this information was updated 1/10/22.

What is Omicron?

Omicron is a variant (also called a “strain”) of COVID-19. Viruses change constantly. These changes are called “mutations.” Sometimes these mutations result in a new variant (or strain) of the virus.

What makes Omicron different?

Omicron has about 50 mutations. Many of these changes are in the “spike protein,” a part of the COVID-19 virus that is involved in infecting people. These changes allow Omicron to spread faster than the original COVID-19 virus. For every 1 person infected with the COVID-19 Omicron variant, about 3 or 3.5 other people will become infected. In comparison, for every 1 person infected with COVID-19 Delta variant, only 1.5 additional people become infected.

Is Omicron worse than Delta?

The Omicron variant does appear on average to cause more mild infections compared to the Delta variant based on the early research. However, because the Omicron variant spreads from person to person so easily, many people will become infected with COVID-19, potentially leading to high numbers of hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19.

Are vaccines effective against Omicron?

Vaccines are work very well at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death in people get Omicron. The vaccines alone (without a booster) are not as good at keeping you from getting infected with Omicron (they are much better against Delta). The good news is that a COVID-19 booster vaccine (in ADDITION to the original vaccine) improves your protection from getting a new infection with Omicron. **That is why it is very important to get the COVID-19 vaccines AND a booster**, to lower your risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and to help prevent you from getting severe illness.

How can you prevent Omicron?

The best ways to prevent Omicron (and all strains of COVID-19) are:

- Get vaccinated, including receiving your booster vaccine
- Wear a mask when with other people, even outdoors
- Wash your hands often
- Get tested if you are having any COVID-19 symptoms, including fevers, chills, chest pain, shortness of breath, new headache, cough, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea

If I had COVID before, am I protected against Omicron?

People who were infected with other COVID-19 variants in the past can still catch Omicron. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine and booster is better protection against Omicron than just having been infected with COVID-19 in the past.

How can you treat COVID-19?

The most common ways to treat COVID-19 is to rest, stay well hydrated, and use medicine to decrease aches and fevers like Tylenol (Acetaminophen) or Advil (Ibuprofen) when needed. People with COVID-19 who have certain chronic medical conditions or are above age 65 may be eligible for COVID-19 treatments. There are 2 main types of COVID-19-specific treatments: monoclonal antibody therapies and anti-viral therapies. Monoclonal antibody treatments give your body special proteins (antibodies) that help your body fight off COVID-19. Anti-viral medicines fight the COVID-19 virus by keeping the virus from growing and replicating inside your body. The decision about when to use these treatments depends on 1) the type of COVID-19 strain, 2) the patient’s medical problems, and 3) the patient’s symptoms. Additionally, these medicines are new, so they are in very short supply. If you get COVID-19, your medical team can tell you if you need COVID-19 medicines. If you need to go to the hospital because of a COVID-19 infection, you may receive COVID-19 treatments like these or others, such as steroids or medicines that work on the immune system.