

## Holiday Plans

- What does Omicron mean for my holiday plans?

We need to be more careful, even people who are boosted.

Plans to travel need not be cancelled **BUT** try to **avoid** areas that have very high Covid right now <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>

Also:

- make sure everyone is **FULLY VACCINATED**
- keep groups small
- keep a mask on at all **times** on trains, buses, planes and in indoor public places

- What does it mean to be **fully** vaccinated?

This used to mean 2 doses of Pfizer or Moderna or 1 dose of J&J vaccine. But soon the official definition will include a **booster** shot for everyone.

**Get your booster as soon as possible**



**IT'S HERE Y'ALL**

**A NEW KIND  
OF COVID IS IN  
SF!!!!**

**GET BOOSTED!**

## this issue

- What is Omicron?
- How do we protect ourselves, our family, and community?
- What does this do to my holiday plans?

## What is Omicron?

The Covid-19 virus is changing. The type of Covid that swept through the world starting in July, named **Delta**, is still raging and taking more lives every day.

**Omicron** was recently discovered in S. Africa and has already spread to the US...**it's in San Francisco** and spreading fast.

Omicron has more changes (called "mutations") than all the earlier versions of Covid. Because of this, scientists are worried about three things:

- Is Omicron spreading faster than Delta? **Answer: YES** – much faster.
- Could Omicron cause more deaths? **Answer: YES** - Because it spreads so fast, it **IS EXPECTED** to cause more deaths.
- Do our current vaccines work against Omicron? **Answer: Not as well** as they did with Delta. But the **3<sup>rd</sup> shot (booster)** protects **MUCH BETTER** than the first 2 shots alone.

## How do we protect ourselves?

### 1. **The first two shots are not enough.**

**We must all get boosted as soon as possible!**

2. More than ever, it is critical for everyone over age 5 to be vaccinated. Unvaccinated people who have avoided Covid so far are now at **MUCH** higher risk. Hospitals are filling up again...mainly with unvaccinated people!
3. **Mask Up!** Because Omicron spreads so fast, and because the vaccines don't fully protect us, we must also wear masks in indoor public places. And we need better masks now. Scientists say cloth masks do not provide enough protection. (For more on masks, see Page 2).
4. **Frequent testing** can help us stop the spread. At-home Covid tests are available that can tell you if you have Covid and are contagious right now. The test shows if you can spread the virus to people around you and if you need to isolate. (See more about testing on Page 2).

# Is it Covid.....



or a cold/allergy?

Omicron Covid can have symptoms just like a cold, allergies or the flu. It's important to know what you have:

- to avoid spreading Covid to others
- to get the right treatment

or the flu?



**At-home Covid tests** are available and are easy to use. You get results in 15 minutes. If your at-home test result is positive (+) you should get a professional test (called PCR test) to confirm if Covid is present.

**If you can, use at-home tests frequently.** Here's why:

- People with NO SYMPTOMS can have Covid and can spread it to others.
- Especially with Omicron since our vaccines don't protect us completely, it's good to test before getting together with friends or family, vulnerable people (elderly, very young children, immune compromised), and anywhere that masking may not be widely used. Do a test as close as possible to the time you'll be with other people.

Experts seem to have the most confidence in the test called BinaxNOW. This test tells you if you have Covid and if you can spread it. These can cost \$20-\$25 for two tests, but Walmart has them for \$14: <https://www.walmart.com> and search Binax. People with health insurance will soon be able to get reimbursed for these tests so keep your receipts. The federal government is also trying to get them to people for free.

## Which masks are best? Where can I get them?



**Cloth mask:** better than nothing but can't trap viruses. Adding layers increases protection but not enough

**Surgical mask:** Good material but gaps can allow virus in

**Respirator mask:** Filters almost all viruses. These are known as N95, KN95, KF94 and other names

Omicron spreads so easily that doctors are now recommending more protection than we can get from cloth masks. Instead, use masks called "respirators". These are tight-fitting enough to seal around the face.

When used correctly, respirators protect the wearer and people around them. In addition to the good fit, they are **made of material that traps viruses**. Experts say these masks can be worn up to 40 hours before they need to be replaced.

But there are many fakes on the market. To avoid them, a non-profit organization, **Project N95**, tests and sells masks that are the real thing. Go to: <https://www.projectn95.org/>

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