

MEDIA RELEASE

ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



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COUNTY OF ERIE
OFFICE OF THE
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Omicron variant identified in Erie County, health measures recommended

The Erie County Department of Health announces that six cases of COVID-19 with the Omicron variant have been identified in Erie County.

The variant was identified in specimens received from members of a local organization for which Gannon University performs regular surveillance testing. Gannon researchers confirmed the variant through genomic sequencing that was completed Sunday.

Surveillance monitoring is an effective screening tool for institutes of higher learning to quickly identify COVID-19 cases which is important in preventing rapid spread. Gannon has been using surveillance monitoring for its own community since July 2020 and has been providing the service to several other local organizations for many months. The university developed the capability to sequence COVID-19 samples for variants a few months ago.

“The department appreciates very much that our community partners such as Gannon University continues to work closely with us. Public health is a shared and continuing effort. It takes all of our work to put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Melissa Lyon, director of the Erie County Department of Health.

Prevalence

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released estimates that the prevalence of Omicron in Pennsylvania will be 75.8% for the four weeks leading up to Dec 18.

Much of what is known about the Omicron variant, such as how infectious it is and how severe the illnesses it causes can be, is preliminary and subject to change. What is known thus far, according to the CDC, is that the Omicron variant may cause an increase in infections most likely due to how easily it spreads and due to its likelihood of causing infections in persons who are fully vaccinated, have received boosters, and/or have natural immunity from previous COVID-19 disease.

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Protection

Current vaccines, including boosters, are expected to protect against severe illness, the likelihood of needing hospitalization and deaths due to infection with the Omicron variant; the same way vaccines have remained effective with other variants such as Delta. It should be noted that breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated are likely to occur.

The Erie County Department of Health strongly recommends that all Erie County residents 5 years and older who are eligible to become vaccinated, including getting boosters. If having concerns or questions about vaccines, approach healthcare professionals or contact the Erie County Department of Health at 814-451-6700 for facts and answers.

Importance of getting tested

Unvaccinated or vaccinated, testing for COVID-19 is recommended if exposed to anyone who has COVID-19 or if exhibiting its symptoms such as coughing, difficulty breathing, fever or chills, muscle or body aches, vomiting or diarrhea, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell. Testing results can help determine appropriate care and treatment if needed.

Stay home

To prevent the spread of infection to others, community members should stay home while waiting for test results. Individuals whose test results are positive, even if they do not have symptoms, should:

- stay home
- stay apart from others in their homes and, if possible, use a separate bathroom
- inform their close contacts to stay home and get tested

For guidance on quarantine and isolation, call the Erie County Department of Health at 814-451-6700.

Wear masks

Wearing a mask that covers the mouth and nose has been proven to reduce the spread of infectious respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19. Studies on the effects of wearing masks have proved that there is no change in oxygen or carbon dioxide levels when people wear cloth or surgical masks while resting and exercising.

Erie County currently has a high rate of transmission, according to the CDC. CDC guidelines recommend all people, including those who are fully vaccinated, should wear masks indoors in areas with substantial to high transmission rates of COVID-19.

For guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 at events and business establishments, contact Erie County Department of Health at covidresponse@eriecountypa.gov. All other questions about COVID-19 can be directed to 814-451-6700 or ecdhinfo@eriecountypa.gov.

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