



Winter 2022

Green Ridge House Gazette

All About the Covid19 Omicron Variant

A current Covid19 variant of concern is the Omicron variant, which was discovered November 2021 and has spread rapidly across the country. Research is still being done, but what do we know about Omicron so far?

Spread: The biggest concern with Omicron is that it spreads more easily than other Covid19 variants like Delta. Based on early data, people who catch Omicron get sick faster, in three or fewer days. This means they are also contagious sooner.

Symptoms: Omicron may result in a milder illness that can resemble a cold for some people. Loss of taste and smell seems less common, while a sore throat, cough, runny nose, and tiredness seem more common. One early report suggests that Omicron primarily affects the upper respiratory tract, which includes your nose, mouth, throat, and voice box, rather than going deeper to affect the lungs. This could be why it spreads more easily but has milder symptoms. However, milder initial symptoms do not necessarily mean the Omicron variant has less severe long-term effects.

The official position of the CDC is that the current severity of Omicron is unclear. Turn the page for more on Omicron variant testing and treatment.



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All About the Covid19 Omicron Variant (cont.)

For more information on how to get free at-home Covid19 tests, see pages 3 and 4.



Testing: Another problem with Omicron is that at-home Covid19 tests, also called **rapid antigen tests** or rapid tests, may be less sensitive to detecting it. There may be more cases where someone tests negative on a rapid test but can still test positive on a lab Covid19 test, also called a **PCR test**, which is much more sensitive.

Rapid tests are still useful and often the most available option for testing all Covid19 variants, especially when PCR tests can take several days to return results. Just keep in mind that taking rapid tests more frequently makes them more effective, which is why rapid test kits include two tests. They are designed to be used over two days so the multiple tests reduce the chance of getting a false negative. If you think you might have been exposed to Covid19 and are feeling sick but test negative once, consider taking a second rapid test to be sure.

Vaccines and Treatment: Experts warn Omicron may only seem mild now because many early reports are coming from breakthrough infections, or infections in vaccinated people. Omicron seems to be able to cause breakthrough infections more readily and vaccinated people have been found to be able to spread it, but early studies show that having a third vaccine dose or booster protects you better.

Though Omicron breakthrough infections are happening, the reports of mild symptoms show vaccines are still effective in preventing any Covid19 variant from making you severely ill. Unvaccinated people are still the most vulnerable to severe Covid19 complications, and there is worry that Omicron can still cause long term health issues such as heart inflammation, or “**long Covid**,” like other variants do—especially since early evidence suggests current Covid19 treatments (called **monoclonal antibody treatments**) may not be as effective against Omicron.

Ultimately follow up studies are needed to confirm these findings about Omicron, but our best defenses against all Covid19 variants remain the same: get vaccinated and boosted, wear a mask, and social distance.

Why Celebrate American Heart Month?

Heart disease is the leading cause of mortality for adults in the U.S. and the CDC estimates that every 1 in 4 deaths in the U.S. is caused by heart disease. By celebrating American Heart Month, we are raising awareness for and promoting heart-healthy lifestyles to reduce the toll that heart disease takes on American lives. February is an annual reminder to show your heart some love and consider what you can do for your heart health.

This article will include some tips and healthy habits to try out to improve your heart health. Healthy habits are often best made with small and consistent changes incorporated in your daily routine. Remember to follow-up with your doctor to assess your risk and come up with a plan best suited for your lifestyle.

Ways to Reduce Your Risk of Heart Disease:

1. Staying Active: Aim for activities that will make your heart beat faster, any and all movements count!
a. Enjoy a brisk walk (maybe bring a friend!)
b. Follow along some senior-friendly yoga, tai chi, pilates, or dance videos available online.

2. Eating Healthy
Add more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat poultry and fish, nuts and beans, and low-fat dairy to your diet. Try fewer foods with high sodium, processed sugar, and saturated and trans fats.

3. Reducing Stress: Stress can cause high blood pressure and increase poor health habits like smoking, not eating healthy, not taking your medicine, and less physical activity.
a. Practice gratitude by naming things you are grateful for.
b. Spend time outside each day.
c. Get at least 8 hours of sleep.
d. Connect with loved ones.

Free At-Home Covid19 Tests Now Available

Starting January 15, many people will be able to get at-home tests for free through a new federal initiative. If you have private health insurance, you will be eligible for reimbursement after you buy any at-home Covid test approved by the FDA online or at a pharmacy. You should be allowed to buy at least eight tests a month under the policy—just make sure to keep your receipts.

If you do not have private insurance, as of January 19 **free tests are available to all Americans by home delivery. Every home in the U.S. can now order four free at-home Covid19 tests through a federal website. The tests are completely free—there are no shipping costs and you do not need to enter a credit card**

Go to [covidtests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov) to order. If you need computer or internet access or need help navigating online, contact the Service Coordinator at **301-412-2480**.

The home page of covidtests.gov should look like this:

An official website of the United States government [Here's how you know](#) ▼

COVIDtests.gov

English Español

Covidtests.gov is up and running early so we can test the site before our official launch tomorrow. We have tests for every residential address in the U.S. Please check back tomorrow if you run into any unexpected issues.



Get free at-home COVID-19 tests

Every home in the U.S. is eligible to order 4 free at-home COVID-19 tests. The tests are completely free. Orders will usually ship in 7-12 days.

Order your tests now so you have them when you need them.

[Order Free At-Home Tests](#)

If you need a COVID-19 test now, please see [other testing resources](#) for free testing locations in your area.

The City of Greenbelt is also planning to distribute at-home tests to all Green Ridge House residents. More details to come.

Ongoing Events at Green Ridge House

Grocery Distribution: Mondays from 1 PM – 1:30 PM in the Dining Room, when available.

Monthly Produce Delivery: Every third Thursday of the month.

Congregate Meal Program: Fridays in the Dining Room. Contact Ms. Marvel Brown at **301-474-1135** for details.

Art Class: Mondays from 10 AM – 11 AM in the Ceramics Room. Sign up on the sheet in the lobby.

Laughter Yoga Class: Thursdays from 10 AM – 11 AM in the Community Room.

Wii Interactive Games: Thursdays from 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM in the Community Room.

Glenda's Chat and Chew: Every fourth Tuesday of the month at 2:30 PM in the Community Room.

Arts for the Aging: Every fourth Wednesday of the month at 2 PM in the Community Room.