

PFT COVID Update 1-12-22: Omicron Surge - Vaccine Insight - Mask Update - Links

CORONAVIRUS



Updates

The Omicron Surge: Vaccines More Important Than Ever.

The surge in COVID-19 infections due to the Omicron variant has caused as much confusion as it has concern over the last several weeks.

In this edition of the Covid update—we're simply trying to provide information that will help to alleviate both. And while our information cannot always be a "quick read", the time you take now may spare you or someone you know serious stress or strain when the time comes to deal directly with the Coronavirus.

With as much that has changed statistically since Omicron's emergence as the dominant strain of COVID-19 worldwide—some things simply haven't changed:

1. Full vaccination and applicable boosters (*if you are eligible/physically able to receive them*) are currently the best protection against COVID-19. This is explained in further detail below.
2. Conscientious wearing of a mask (*particularly new mask guidance*) still helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This is also explained further below.
3. Social distancing, avoiding large crowds of people with unknown vaccine status (*particularly indoors*), and good hygiene all still have a positive role to play in minimizing spread of COVID-19.

Understanding What Vaccines Do, and Don't Do.

Over the course of history, medical science has created vaccines that have virtually eradicated diseases like Polio or Smallpox.

But more often than not, vaccines are designed to help the body create a robust immune-response to a specific disease or virus. Seasonal flu. HPV. MMR. Chicken pox. DPT and more—including Covid-19.

In some instances, the body's response generated by a vaccine may be strong enough to prevent a person from contracting a malady altogether. In many other instances, the body's immune response created by a vaccine is strong enough to help successfully *minimize* the severity of a disease or virus, and shorten the time someone is either sick or contagious.

Just like getting a flu shot can't guarantee you won't get the flu—Covid-19 vaccines can't guarantee you'll completely avoid the Coronavirus (*the Omicron variant specifically*). In a vast majority of vaccinated people however, COVID vaccines are either preventing or drastically minimizing the severity of the resultant illness.

On the whole, vaccinated people are getting less sick, are being hospitalized far less for COVID-related illness, and are dying far less frequently than the unvaccinated are. This is not a political statement or wacky claim—it's just math.

The New York Times Newsletter took a deep look at two cities mired in the current Omicron surge (*first article*), and what the data tells us from these representative examples makes a compelling case for full vaccination against COVID-19.

[Click here to read the Times' coronavirus update in its entirety.](#)

The bottom line from the above reference?

Vaccination remains highly effective at preventing severe Covid illnesses. And **Omicron is milder** than earlier versions of the virus. The combination means that most Americans — including children and vaccinated adults — face little personal risk from Omicron.

The risk is not zero, to be clear, even among people who are generally healthy. But it is very small. Every day, people live with small risks, be they from the seasonal flu and other illnesses or from riding in a vehicle, playing sports or other activities,

For the unvaccinated, the situation is very different. Omicron is still severe enough that it will lead to debilitating illness and death for many unvaccinated people,

Anticipate a Nationwide Push for N-95 Masks.

While the Omicron variant might be trending to be less severe overall, it is most certainly proving to be far more contagious and transmissible—so much so that you can anticipate a nationwide movement toward a mask upgrade for many Americans. Expect medical grade masks (*KN-95, N95 and surgical*) to be in high demand very soon as a result of the Omicron variant.

At the heart of it all is a mask's ability to prevent smaller particles (*respiratory droplets*) from spreading by either escaping or entering the mask or masks you are currently wearing. Cloth masks are proving to be largely ineffective against Omicron, and while standard surgical masks

are designed to capture those smaller particles better, they may not always fit as well or as tightly as necessary.

The chart below simplifies what mask works best for how long—however if you really want to know everything you need to know about mask choices—the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* ran a excellent explainer article yesterday that is definitely worth the read.

[Click here to learn more about masking up against Omicron.](#)

Time it takes to transmit an infectious dose of Covid-19

PERSON NOT INFECTED IS WEARING

		Nothing	Cloth mask	Surgical mask	N95
PERSON INFECTED IS WEARING	Nothing	15 min.	20 min.	30 min.	2.5 hours
	Cloth mask	20 min.	27 min.	40 min.	3.3 hours
	Surgical mask	30 min.	40 min.	1 hour	5 hours
	N95	2.5 hours	3.3 hours	5 hours	25 hours

It will take 25 hours for an infectious dose of Covid-19 to transmit between people wearing non-fit-tested N95 respirators. **If they're using tightly sealed N95s—where only 1% of particles enter the facepiece—they will have 2,500 hours of protection.**

The article above the image contains links to buying recommendations, as well as a caution against ordering inferior or counterfeit medical grade masks.

**** NOTE:** To achieve an ideal seal for your medical-grade (N-95 or similar) mask— experts recommend trimming or shaving your beard—particularly those people in healthcare or high-contact environments.

If you're planning on keeping your facial hair, a surgical mask alone or one paired with a cloth mask may afford you adequate protection based on your level of exposure to the public. [Click here to learn more.](#)

*** To find a COVID-19 vaccine, use the [federal government's online tool](#), call [1-800-232-0233](tel:1-800-232-0233) for multilingual support, or text your zip code to 438829 (GETVAX). ***

Information Links That Bear Repeating:

Below please find additional links providing helpful information you can bookmark and count on as the COVID-19 situation changes and evolves.

[AFT/AFTPA Coronavirus Resources & Updates for Members](#)

[Find a Vaccine Provider Near You](#)

[AFT/PFT Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)

-- A Negotiated, Free Benefit to Members

[Click for EAP Information Flyer](#) *(includes login info)*

[Click for Life Skills Solutions Website](#) *(login upper right)*

[AFT Share My Lesson Stress Management Resources](#) *(searchable)*

[Download the PA COVID-Alert Tracking App](#)

[National Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Coronavirus Resources](#)

[CDC Data Tracking Page](#)

[CDC Vaccine Information Landing Page](#)

[PPS Coronavirus Resources and Links](#)

[PA Department of Health Coronavirus Resources](#)

[PA-Specific Resources from Senator Casey](#)

[Student Debt Relief Resources](#)

[Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) Rumor Control](#)

[Coronavirus Testing Locations](#) *(view interactive map mid page)*



Coronavirus Self-Checker

A guide to help you make decisions and seek appropriate medical care

** PFT Coronavirus Updates Released Periodically As Needed **

Missed an update or message? [View our archive of COVID-19 Updates here](#).

Please keep in touch—keep sharing your ideas, your questions and your concerns.

In solidarity—

Dan Evans

PFT Communications Director