

UNMASK THE FACTS

December 13 – January 2

December 23, 2021

CDC updates guidance on healthcare worker isolation and quarantine

To prepare for the anticipated increase in Omicron cases, CDC released updated guidance for isolation and quarantine for healthcare workers, decreasing their isolation time after infection with COVID-19. These updates provide healthcare facilities with the strategies to limit the effects of staff shortages caused by COVID-19 on patient care. Healthcare workers with COVID-19 who are asymptomatic can return to work after 7 days with a negative test, and isolation time can be cut further if there are staffing shortages. Also, healthcare workers who have received all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses, including a booster, do not need to quarantine at home following high-risk exposures.

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December 27, 2021

CDC shortens the isolation and quarantine periods for the public

Under this new guidance, people with a positive COVID-19 test (regardless of vaccination status) should isolate for at least 5 days. If they are asymptomatic or their symptoms are resolving (without fever for 24 hours) after 5 days, then they can leave isolation if they wear a mask around others for the next 5 days. People who are unvaccinated or are more than 6 months out from their second mRNA dose (or more than 2 months out from their J&J vaccine) and are not yet boosted should quarantine for 5 days after exposure followed by strict mask use for an additional 5 days. Individuals who have received their booster shot do not need to quarantine after exposure but should wear a mask for 10 days after exposure.

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December 28, 2021

Omicron becomes the most dominant variant in the United States

According to [data](#) from the CDC, the Omicron variant was estimated to be 58.6% of the variants circulating in the U.S. as of December 25. The agency also revised the Omicron proportion of cases for the week ending December 18, reducing it to 22% from 73%. The Delta variant, which had been the dominant strain in the past few months, accounts for 41.1% of all U.S. COVID-19 cases as of December 25.

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December 29, 2021

COVID-19 cases are at their highest levels since the pandemic began

With an average of 265,000 cases per day, the new COVID-19 cases have soared to their highest level since the pandemic began in 2020. The cases are related to the increase of the Omicron variant. New cases per day have more than doubled over the past two weeks. Particularly in [Puerto Rico](#), the number of cases per 100,000 residents jumped to 225, from 3, in three weeks. A third of all coronavirus cases the island has recorded since the start of the pandemic occurred last month.

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December 22, 2021

FDA grants EUA to two antiviral pills for the treatment of COVID-19

The FDA has issued an EUA for the emergency use of the first two oral medicines against COVID-19: [Pfizer's Paxlovid](#) and [Merck's molnupiravir](#). In clinical trials, Paxlovid reduced the risk of hospitalization or death by 88% when given within five days of symptom onset. It is authorized for vaccinated and unvaccinated people over the age of 12 infected with mild to moderate COVID-19 for less than 5 days who are at high risk of severe disease. In comparison, molnupiravir showed a 30% reduction in hospitalization or death and is authorized for patients 18 and older. [NIH recommends](#) molnupiravir to prevent high-risk patients from developing severe disease, but only if Paxlovid or other treatments are unavailable. Neither drug is a substitute for vaccination.

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