

UT Southwestern Medical Center

Update on the Omicron Variant

Dec. 17, 2021

To the UT Southwestern Community:

Given the recent news that UT Southwestern researchers positively identified the Omicron variant in North Texas, I am writing to share an update regarding our ongoing efforts to monitor the spread and prevalence of the COVID-19 virus across our region and amongst the UT Southwestern community.

Currently, Omicron accounts for 3% of new COVID-19 cases in the United States, but it is expected to overtake the Delta variant as the most prevalent strain in the coming weeks. Our forecasting model, which has effectively guided our decision-making from the pandemic's start, indicates that the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Dallas and Tarrant counties is likely to increase as we approach the new year.

At this time, we do not plan to modify any of our campus operations, but I have asked the Emergency Operations Committee (EOC) to reconvene and continue to monitor the situation and provide recommendations as needed. Continue to look for important updates in our campus newsletter, Today@UTSW, which is emailed at 5 a.m. Monday through Friday to all faculty and staff.

In light of the possibility of an Omicron-fueled increase in COVID-19 transmission, I urge anyone who has not been vaccinated to do so now. For those who have been vaccinated and are eligible, I highly urge you to schedule a booster dose, given that the booster appears to substantially improve protection against the Omicron variant. Employees can schedule COVID-19 vaccine shots and booster doses through [MyChart](#) or the [UTSW.net site](#). Vaccinations are administered in the second floor Education and Conference Center at William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital. Due to scheduled campus closures in observance of the holidays, please note that COVID-19 and flu shots will not be provided on Friday, December 24, or Friday, December 31.

During the upcoming holidays, I encourage everyone to follow the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidelines](#) to help protect your family and friends and slow the spread of COVID-19. In addition to vaccination, CDC recommendations include wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth, avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces, and maintaining a 6-foot distance from people who do not live in your household. If you are sick or have symptoms, don't host or attend a gathering, and consider using a self-test before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household.

As I shared in my holiday letter that was mailed to your home this week, thank you once again for your steadfast commitment to our patients, our learners, and each other throughout the pandemic. We appreciate your continued dedication to our mission and will endeavor to keep you apprised of any new developments as they arise. I hope you have a safe and enjoyable holiday season, and I wish each of you the best for 2022.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President, UT Southwestern Medical Center