

CORONAVIRUS NEWS BRIEF

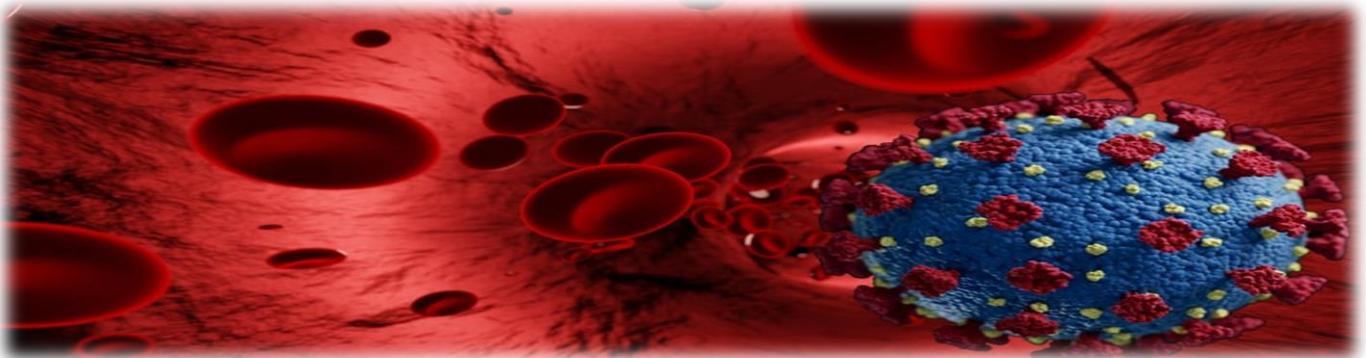
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For South Asian Media Network INC, USA.

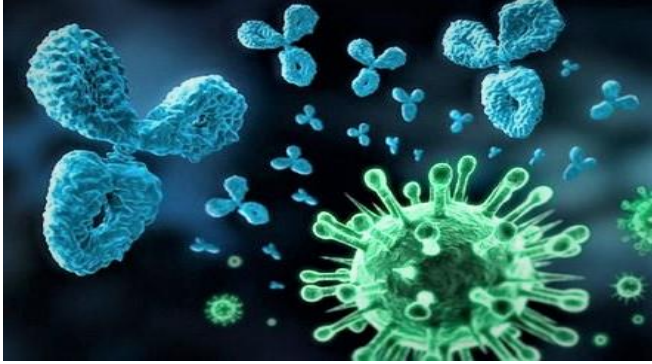
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***Omicron, a new Covid-19 variant
with high number of mutations, sparks travel bans and
worries scientists***

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Omicron, a new Covid-19 variant with high number of mutations, sparks travel bans and worries scientists.



The discovery of a new and potentially more transmissible coronavirus variant by South African health authorities has sparked a forceful reaction across the world, with a number of countries banning travelers from several southern African countries.

The World Health Organization announced Friday it has designated the newly identified coronavirus variant, B.1.1.529, as a variant of concern, named Omicron.

Besides South Africa, the newly identified variant has been detected in Botswana, Hong Kong and Belgium.

It appears to be spreading rapidly in parts of South Africa and scientists are concerned its unusually high number of mutations could make it more transmissible and result in immune evasion.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said there is a "high to very high" risk the new variant will spread in Europe.

WHO's Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution (TAG-VE), an independent group of experts, met Friday to discuss the variant, a WHO statement said.

The advisers recommended WHO designate the variant as "of concern," referencing the variant's large number of mutations, the possibility of increased risk of reinfection and other evidence.

A number of studies are underway, and WHO will update member states and the public as needed, the WHO statement said.

WHO called on countries to enhance their surveillance and sequencing efforts to better understand coronavirus variants.

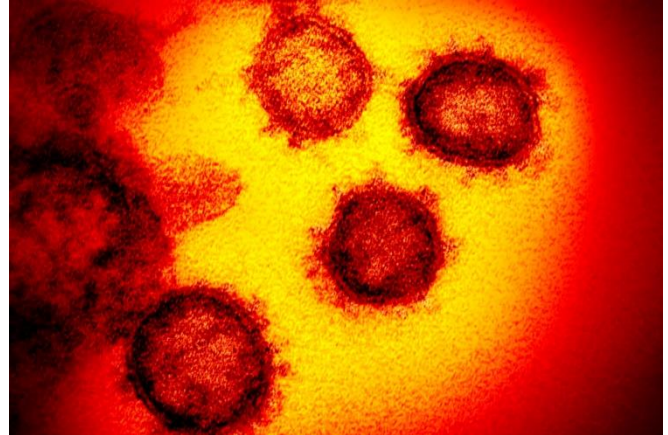
"Initially it looked like some cluster outbreaks, but from yesterday, the indication came from our scientists

from the Network of Genomic Surveillance that they were observing a new variant," Joe Phaahla, South Africa's Minister of Health, said Thursday, stressing it is currently unclear where the variant first emerged.

South African officials initially said there was one confirmed case in a traveler from South Africa to Hong Kong. Then Hong Kong health authorities on Friday identified a second case of the B.1.1.529 variant among returning travelers on the same floor of a designated quarantine hotel.

Also on Friday, the Belgian government said one individual who had recently arrived from abroad, and was not vaccinated, had tested positive for the new variant, marking the first case in Europe.

Tulio de Oliveira, the director of South Africa's Center for Epidemic Response and Innovation, said the variant has "many more mutations than we have expected," adding it is "spreading very fast, and we expect to see pressure in the health system in the next few days and weeks."



This undated electron microscope image shows the virus that causes COVID-19. Scientists are worried the omicron and the delta variant could link up and create a new super variant.

Viruses, including the one that causes Covid-19, mutate regularly and most new mutations do not have significant impact on the virus's behavior and the illness they cause.

Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's School of Public Health, told CNN the variant was "acting differently," however, and it "looks like it's much more contagious than even the Delta variant."

A number of countries, among them the United States, have imposed new travel restrictions and markets in the US, Asia and Europe fell sharply following the news of its discovery.

Acting on advice from US health officials, US President Joe Biden will restrict travel from South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi, administration officials told CNN.

This does not apply to American citizens and lawful permanent residents. As with all international travelers, they must still test negative prior to travel.

What we know about the new variant?



An intubated COVID-19 patient gets treatment at the intensive care unit at the Westerstede Clinical Center, a military-civilian hospital in Westerstede, northwest Germany.

Lawrence Young, a virologist and a professor of molecular oncology at Warwick Medical School in the United Kingdom, said the Omicron variant was "very worrying."

"It is the most heavily mutated version of the virus we have seen to date. This variant carries some changes we've seen previously in other variants but never all together in one virus. It also has novel mutations," Young said in a statement.

The variant has a high number of mutations, about 50 overall. Crucially, South African genomic scientists said Thursday more than 30 of the mutations were found in the spike protein -- the structure the virus uses to get into the cells they attack.

Neil Ferguson, the director of the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College London, said in a statement the number of mutations on the spike protein was "unprecedented."

"The spike protein gene [is] the protein which is the target of most vaccines. There is therefore a concern that this variant may have a greater potential to escape prior immunity than previous variants," Ferguson said.

Sharon Peacock, a professor of Public Health and Microbiology at the University of Cambridge, said while the overall number of Covid-19 cases is relatively low in South Africa, there has been a rapid increase in the past seven days.

She said while 273 new infections were recorded on November 16, the figure had risen to more than 1,200 cases by November 25, with more than 80% coming from Gauteng province.

"The epidemiological picture suggests that this variant may be more transmissible, and several mutations are consistent with enhanced transmissibility," Peacock said in a comment shared by the UK's Science Media Centre.

She added while the significance of the mutations and their combination is unknown, some of those present in the latest variant have been associated in others with immune evasion.

Jha, too, said scientists were concerned by the speed with which the Omicron variant has taken off. "This one has become dominant very quickly in South Africa, in the regions where it's been found, within a matter of days to weeks as opposed to months," he told CNN.

What we don't know

Peacock, de Oliveira, Ferguson, Jha and other scientists said it was too early to tell the full impact of the mutations on vaccine efficacy.

De Oliveira stressed the Covid-19 shots are still the best tool against the virus, adding lab studies still need to be carried out to test vaccine and antibody evasion.

"I don't think we're going to see a situation where the vaccines will be rendered useless," said Jha. "I think that's exceedingly unlikely. The question is, is there a tiny hit to vaccine efficacy, or is there a large hit? I think we'll get some preliminary data probably in the next few days."

More studies also need to be conducted to understand the clinical severity of the variant compared to previous variants.

It is also unclear where the new mutation emerged from. While it was first identified in South Africa, it may have come from elsewhere.

"It is important not to assume that the variant first emerged in South Africa," Peacock said.

Vaccine maker Moderna said Friday the combination of mutations seen in the new Omicron variant represents a "significant potential risk to accelerate the waning of natural and vaccine-induced immunity."

The company said it was working rapidly to test the ability of its vaccine to neutralize the new variant and data was expected in the coming weeks.

AstraZeneca, another vaccine maker, said it was looking to understand the impact the Omicron variant has on its coronavirus vaccine, and was testing its antibody combination therapy against the new variant. The platform used in the vaccine enables the company to respond quickly to new variants, a spokesperson for the company said Friday.

"AstraZeneca is also already conducting research in locations where the variant has been identified, namely in Botswana and Eswatini, that will enable us to collect real world data of Vaxzevria against this new virus variant," the spokesperson said.

AstraZeneca's vaccine is not currently authorized for use in the US.

Johnson & Johnson said it is testing its vaccine against the new variant.

Quick reaction



Scientists have praised South African health authorities for their quick reaction to a Covid-19 outbreak in the country's Gauteng province, which led to the discovery of the new variant.

When cases in the province started to rise at a higher rate than elsewhere, health experts focused on sequencing samples from those who tested positive, which allowed them to quickly identify the B.1.1.529 variant.

Peacock said the South African health ministry and its scientists "are to be applauded in their response, their science, and in sounding the alarm to the world."

She added the development shows how important it is to have excellent sequencing capabilities and to share expertise with others.

The reaction to the announcement of the new variant discovered by South African health authorities was also prompt.

UK officials announced Thursday six African countries would be added to England's travel "red list" after the UK Health Security Agency flagged concern over the variant.

UK's Health Minister Sajid Javid said flights to the UK from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana,

Eswatini and Zimbabwe would be suspended from midday Friday and all six countries would be added to the red list -- meaning UK residents and British and Irish nationals arriving home from those points of departure must undergo a 10-day hotel quarantine at their own expense.

Speaking on Friday, Javid said it was "highly likely" the B.1.1.529 variant has spread beyond southern Africa. In a statement to the UK House of Commons Friday Javid expressed concern it may "pose a substantial risk to public health."

European Union states have agreed to introduce temporary restrictions on all travel into the EU from southern Africa over the new Covid-19 variant, the bloc said Friday.

Member states agreed to "introduce rapidly restrictions on all travel into the EU from 7 countries in the Southern Africa region: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe," said EU Commission spokesman Eric Mamer.

Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Israel, Turkey, Egypt, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Jordan have also announced new restrictions on travelers coming from the region.

Canada will be "banning the entry of foreign nationals... that have traveled through southern Africa in the last 14 days," due to the new coronavirus variant, said Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos at a press conference on Friday.

"Canadians and permanent residents and those with a right of entry into Canada will be tested on arrival, [and] they will quarantine until they get the result of a negative test," according to Duclos.

South Africa, like much of the region, has suffered through three significant Covid-19 waves since the pandemic's start.

While the number of new infections across the country is now still relatively low and positivity levels are under 5%, public health officials have already predicted a fourth wave because of a slow vaccine uptake.

South Africa has fully vaccinated 35.37% of its adult population and has seen its rate of people initiating vaccination fall in recent days, according to data from the country's Department of Health.

CNN's Jacqueline Howard, Kaitlan Collins, John Bonifield, Steve Almasy, Duarte Mendonca, Niamh Kennedy, Mia Alberti, Andrew Carey, Amir Tal, Antonia Mortensen, Tim Lister, Nadine Schmidt, Virginia Langmaid and Melissa Alonso contributed reporting.

Omicron is breaching vaccine immunity.



The risk of reinfection with the Omicron coronavirus variant is 5.4 times higher than Delta, a study by Imperial College London shows, underlining the significant impact of the variant on vaccine effectiveness.

The research was based on data on people who tested positive for Covid-19 in England between Nov. 29 and Dec. 11. It includes people identified as having Omicron infection due to an S gene target failure (missing S gene in RT-PCR tests) as well as whose sample gene sequencing confirmed Omicron infection. Controlling for vaccine status, age, sex, ethnicity, asymptomatic status, region and specimen date, Omicron was associated with a 5.4-fold higher risk of reinfection compared with Delta.

The risk of developing a symptomatic Omicron case was particularly high for those two or more weeks past their second vaccine dose, and two or more weeks past their booster dose (for AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines).

This translates into vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic Omicron infection of between 0% and 20% after two doses, and between 55% and 80% after a booster dose.

No evidence was found of Omicron causing lower severity than Delta, based on the proportion of people who reported symptoms or sought hospital care. However, hospitalisation data were very limited at the time of the study.

The study has not yet been peer-reviewed.

They say: "This study provides further evidence of the very substantial extent to which Omicron can evade prior immunity given by both infection or vaccination. This level of immune evasion means that Omicron poses a major, imminent threat to public health" said Prof Neil Ferguson from Imperial College London.

But... it was important not to over-interpret the data, said Dr Clive Dix, former Chair of the UK Vaccine Taskforce. "The conclusions made are based on making assumptions about Omicron where we still don't have sufficient data," he said. Data from South Africa have also shown that vaccines are preventing severe disease and death.

Omicron could worsen global nursing shortages

While crucial aspects of the omicron variant remain uncertain, it's lifting caseloads in the scores of countries in which it has been identified so far. Per WHO, the variant's been detected in 89 countries, and omicron cases are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days in places with community transmission and not just infections acquired abroad.

This raises the prospect of deepening strains on already struggling health systems. And a burnout among frontline healthcare workers could trigger an exodus of nurses, intensifying the pressure on health services already suffering from staff shortages.

The numbers: Some 4.7 million healthcare workers are expected to retire in the next few years and the amount signaling their intentions to quit within the next six months to a year is also increasing, Howard Catton, the chief executive of the International Council of Nurses.

The organisation, whose member associations across 130 countries represent more than 27 million nurses, said there was already a global shortage of around 6 million nurses at the start of the pandemic. That figure could double in the next few years, as nurses retire or flee the profession.

Catton suggested that the impact of another worldwide coronavirus wave could leave the global healthcare industry trying to find replacements for close to half its existing workforce.

He added that he had spoken to nurses who feel they "have run two, three or even four marathons with each wave of the pandemic". Many, he said, are not sure that they can face the physical and emotional toll of another wave with Omicron.

The toll: A WHO paper in September estimated that more than 115,000 healthcare workers had died from Covid, but Catton said that number was based on data from a limited amount of countries and a limited period of time, and may represent only half the real toll.

7 travel predictions for 2022



While Covid-19 is still in the rearview mirror, an unwavering sense of optimism for the future of travel is taking its place. Booking.com commissioned a thorough research with more than 24,000 travellers across 31 countries and territories 1, including India, to predict how travel would continue to be redefined in 2022, combining it with its own data and insights as a digital travel leader for the past 25 years. According to its 'Travel Predictions 2022 Research,' 2022 will be the year to capitalize on uncertainty and begin making up for lost vacation time in a big manner, with the percentage of travellers who believe they need to do so increasing 52% year over year*. The forecasts illustrate how individuals will rekindle their passion for travel in the coming year. It's all about seizing the day in 2022 and making every journey meaningful, whether it's as part of a self-care routine or the excitement of just saying yes to whatever travel possibilities and experiences come their way.

Vitamin Vacay: Travel will become an essential part of self-care.

Getting away on vacation, more than daily exercise or mindful meditation will become the form of self-care in 2022, with over 84 per cent of Indian travellers stating that travel enhances their mental and emotional wellbeing more than other types of rest and relaxation. After more than a year of ever-changing travel restrictions, the significant health and wellness advantages of travel are now being recognized. According to the study, 85 per cent of Indian travellers believe that having a holiday planned improves their mental well-being, and 69 per cent of Indian travellers said they didn't know how important travel was to their well-being until it was no longer a possibility.

Resetting the Out Of (Home) Office: Vacation time will be strictly work free.

When the epidemic struck, houses all over the world became our offices, and the novelty of working from

home became apparent. However, in 2022, we'll see a significant increase in people wanting to reclaim control in order to firmly re-establish a healthy work-life balance, as 77 per cent of Indian travellers' vacation time will be strictly work-free, which wasn't always the case in 2021, when home and remote work lives were blurred. We expect to see more people setting their well-deserved out of (home) office messages in 2022, with 76 per cent of Indian travellers claiming to have worked more hours and used fewer vacation days during the pandemic.

All the First-Time Feels: The anticipation of the journey will be as exciting as the destination.

While many of us may have forgotten where we left our passports or even how to pack, in 2022, all of our out-of-practice travel awkwardness will give way to true delight in even the most mundane aspects of our visits. Rather of racing through the voyage after feeling 'stuck' for so long, travellers will be savoring every moment. The majority of Indian travellers report that simple joys like feeling the sun on their skin (75 per cent) or seeing a body of water of some kind instantly changes their mood for the better, so each of our 'first' visits in 2022 will be a moment to relish (84 per cent). Even the uncertainty of navigating public transit in a new city in a foreign language is something that 75 per cent of Indian travellers say they will appreciate, and 84 per cent think that travel is more pleasurable when the journey feels like part of the trip itself. Recapturing that first-time feeling and leaning in to every single moment will be a trademark of journeys in 2022 after such a long period of limited possibilities.

Community First: Authentic connection with the local community will be priority

Because movement was slowed in many parts of the world due to limitations, the epidemic encouraged us to make the most of what was there in front of us. Our relationship with the community around us has been revived, from supporting locally owned companies to spending more time than ever at the neighborhood park. This desire to connect authentically with the local community will extend to vacations in 2022, as we strive to be more conscious of each trip we take and ensure a good impact on the locations we visit and the people who live there. To that end, 78 per cent of Indian travellers believe it is critical that their trip benefits the local community at their destination, and 75 per cent of Indian travellers would appreciate an app or website that provides recommendations on

destinations where increased tourism would benefit the local community.

Swipe Right on New Places and Faces: 2022 will finally be the time to branch out and make new connections.

For many of us, the epidemic meant spending an extended length of time with our closest friends and family, but vacations in 2022 will provide an opportunity to spread out and develop new connections. We expect to see travellers using their vacations to expand their usual social circles, as 81 per cent of Indian travellers want to meet new people while away. We also expect to see travellers using their vacations to socialize, with 77 per cent of Indian travellers looking forward to socializing while on vacation. Holiday romances are expected to resurface, with 77 per cent of those looking for one on their next vacation.

Just Say Yes: People will be saying YES to travel, making up for the lost travel time.

After hearing “no” for so long, travellers are recovering a more optimistic outlook for 2022. The finest of improve will be brought to travel in the next year, with us reacting with an emphatic “yes, and...” to each unexpected twist and turn in the journey. To that end, roughly 83 per cent of Indian travellers agree that if their budget allows, they will say yes to every vacation option. 79 per cent of Indian travellers are more open to other types of vacations than they were before the pandemic, and 65 per cent don’t care where they go on holiday as long as it’s the type of vacation they want; they’re simply pleased to be away from home. Adopting a positive mindset will allow

travellers to see more of the world than ever before, with many taking a more adventurous approach to their vacation plans, and perhaps even their travel companions.

Embracing the Unpredictable: People will use technology to embrace travels continued unpredictability.

In 2022, uncertainty will be a constant in travel, and while we won’t be able to control or forecast every new surprise and challenge that fate has in store for us, we will welcome it. Over the last year and a half, we’ve relied on technology in a number of ways to stay connected and inspired, and our favorite applications will continue to aid us in navigating the unknown on our travels, with 76 per cent of Indian travellers believing that technology helps ease travel anxiety. With growing refinement and proactivity, technology will continue to smooth out the unexpected bumps on the path.

Ritu Mehrotra, Regional Manager, South Asia at Booking.com, said, “As we look towards the year ahead, we’re seeing a lot of anticipation for Indian travellers to return to travel. Whether it’s domestically or abroad, or just saying yes to whatever travel opportunity comes their way, it’s our mission to make it easier for everyone to explore again when the time is right. We will be there for travellers, offering the widest choice, great value, and the easiest experience from anywhere and on any device, so people can reclaim their travel mojo and enjoy all of the unforgettable experiences this world has to offer, when it’s safe to do so again.”

(Editor’s note:

For helping people and communities, voluntary institutions (NGO’s) in India, Please donate generously specifically for Coronavirus Pandemic and other humanitarian causes. Please use your common sense to donate to the right organization. If possible, give priority to your own family, neighbors and your village/Town or area healthcare systems directly.

There are fraudulent organizations be aware of them. Look into the need and response to those priorities. Get some advice from your Doctors or helping organizations.

Many time Cash Donations are more effective than kind. I would recommend donating to Red Cross of India, UNICEF, Oxfam India, and Care India.

In my personal opinion, please do not send any contributions to India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s PM Care Fund as its not transparent, has no accountability, is a private charity, and not a Government of India organization. -Kaushik Amin).

How to test yourself for Covid-19 at home before you travel or meet with others.



If you need to know whether you have coronavirus but don't want to deal with appointment scheduling and clinic wait times, a self-test can be a convenient solution. But who are self-tests right for? And how do you use them correctly? Coronavirus self-tests -- also known as home tests or over-the-counter tests -- are one of several risk-reduction measures that can protect you and others by reducing the chances of spreading coronavirus, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These tests can be taken at home or anywhere, regardless of your vaccination status or whether you have symptoms, and are easy to use for quick results, the CDC says.

As of November 2021, self-tests detect current coronavirus infections, not antibodies to the virus, according to the CDC.

Everyone should have at least two home tests for every family member, said CNN Medical Analyst Dr. Leana Wen, an emergency physician and visiting professor of health policy and management at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health.

"If you have symptoms or were substantially exposed to someone with Covid-19, you should go get a PCR

test. That's the gold standard," Wen said. "The at-home antigen tests should be used, ideally, when you are asymptomatic and the likelihood of you having Covid is pretty low, but you're using it for assurance purposes."

"Think about the at-home rapid test as a screening test ... for public health purposes, not a diagnostic test," Wen added.

Only buy tests authorized by the US Food and Drug Administration, Wen said. The agency's website has a list of more than 40 FDA-authorized home tests, some of which have age limitations. You can buy these tests online or in pharmacies and some retail stores. Some local health departments or Federally Qualified Health Centers offer them for free, the CDC says.

When you're buying self-tests, make sure they're not expired.

Consider using a self-test before joining indoor gatherings with people who don't live with you, the CDC recommends. This suggestion is especially important if you're planning on being around unvaccinated children, older adults, immunocompromised people or those at risk of severe disease -- and, of course, if you have Covid-19

symptoms or have been exposed or possibly exposed to someone with Covid-19.

Here's what else is important to know for before, during and after taking a self-test.

Preparing and taking self-tests

Until you're ready to use the test, store all test items according to the manufacturer's instructions, the CDC says. This includes not opening it until you're ready to use it.

Before taking the test, clean the surface -- such as the countertop, table, etc. -- on which you'll do the test. Have a timer ready since you might need to time some of the steps.

Carefully read all the manufacturer's instructions, the CDC recommends. Then, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When you open the box, check the test for any damage or discoloration according to the manufacturer's description.

To collect your nasal or saliva sample -- depending on the type of test you have -- and complete the test, chronologically follow the included instructions.

Read the test results only within the timeframe specified in the instructions, the CDC says. If you don't follow the instructions, your test results could be incorrect or invalid or say "error." If this happens --

due to improper use or test malfunction -- check the package inserts for information or contact the manufacturer for help.

Once you've taken the test, don't reuse any of the items, the CDC says. Discard them in the trash, clean all surfaces the sample might have touched and wash your hands.

If you test positive, isolate yourself for at least 10 days, and tell your doctor and any people with whom you've recently had contact. Avoid indoor gatherings and, if you live with others, wear a mask

If your result was negative and you're asymptomatic, you might not have an infection -- but that possibility isn't ruled out. Doing "serial tests" can make self-testing more reliable and reduce your risk of spreading coronavirus if infected, according to the CDC. This means doing two or more tests over several days with at least 24 hours between tests, with one test as close as possible to the event you want to attend.

But if you have Covid-19 symptoms yet still test negative, "you should just go straight to getting a PCR test. Why get an at-home test?" Wen said. "The only situation where you would do that is if you just don't have access to a PCR test."



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દિલથી દિલની સંકર



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CORONAVIRUS: NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD:

**** Pfizer executives say Covid could become endemic by 2024.***

Covid could become an endemic disease by 2024, Pfizer executives said.

Endemic means the coronavirus will not disappear but rather will become a vaccinated-protected ailment like the flu.

The timing could vary from place to place, with some regions moving to an endemic model in the next year or two, Pfizer's chief scientific officer said.



Covid will become an endemic disease as early as 2024, Pfizer executives said Friday, meaning the virus will transition from a global emergency to a constant presence causing regional outbreaks across the world — much like the flu.

"We believe Covid will transition to an endemic state, potentially by 2024," Nanette Cocero, global president of Pfizer Vaccines, said during an investor call Friday.

Covid-19 would reach the endemic level when populations have enough immunity from vaccines or from prior infections to keep transmissions, hospitalizations and deaths under control even as the virus circulates.

"When and how exactly this happens will depend on the evolution of the disease, how effectively society deploys vaccines and treatments, and equitable distribution to places where vaccination rates are low," Pfizer chief scientific officer Mikael Dolsten said. "The emergence of new variants could also impact how the pandemic continues to play out."

The timing of Covid's transition to an endemic state could vary from place to place, according to Dolsten.

"It seems like over the next year or two, some regions will transition to an endemic model while other

regions will continue in pandemic mode," Dolsten said.

The comments from Pfizer executives come as the U.S. battles a surge of Covid cases led by the delta variant, while the omicron strain quickly spreads. The seven-day average of new hospital admissions for Covid jumped 4% from the prior week, Centers for Disease Control Director Rochelle Walensky said Friday in a White House briefing.

Stockpiling vaccines and Covid treatments such as Pfizer's oral antiviral pill could become more commonplace as the disease becomes endemic, Angela Hwang, group president of the Pfizer Biopharmaceuticals Group, said.

Pfizer expects countries will prioritize annual revaccination, Cocero said.

****Fauci Says Omicron Restrictions May Be Needed, Majority Of Americans Disagree.***



White House chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci said Friday that more restrictions may be needed to curb the transmission of COVID-19 if cases continue to surge.

Fauci made the remarks during an appearance on CNBC's Squawk Box, when pressed on the possibility of further measures amid a surge of COVID-19 infections largely fueled by the Delta variant—and increasingly, the Omicron variant.

"You've got to just take things one step at a time and take a look at how things evolve," Fauci

said. "I mean, obviously, if you are vaccinated, your family's vaccinated, you have friends who are vaccinated and hopefully also boosted, you can still enjoy a social gathering generally in a home."

Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, urged Americans to be cautious when going into large public indoor spaces "where there are a lot of people there. And that's the reason why you should be wearing a mask under those circumstances," the nation's leading infectious disease expert said. But you gotta follow what's going on," he cautioned. "If the counts keep going up and the test positivity keeps going up, we may need to be more restrictive."

Fauci added that for now, individuals who are vaccinated and those who have received their booster shots "should feel reasonably comfortable.

The risk was never zero. That's for sure."

Fauci's remarks come shortly after a recent nationwide poll found that the majority of Americans oppose new mandates and restrictions to address the highly transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19. The survey, conducted by The Trafalgar Group and Convention of States Action between December 4 to 7, asked 1084 Americans about whether they would favor restrictions to tackle the Omicron variant. It found that 69.4 percent of Americans say "no new mandates or restrictions are required" for the variant, opposed to 30.6 percent who say the opposite.

The Trafalgar Group is ranked A- by FiveThirtyEight for its polling accuracy, with a perceived 1.3% bias towards Republicans. Convention of States Action is a project founded by Citizens for Self Governance, a right-wing political organization with ties to the Koch brothers.

"Unlike government health officials in Washington, DC, Americans have already figured out that mandates and lockdowns are not the way we will beat the COVID-19 pandemic," said Mark Meckler, president of Convention of States Action.

"As we've seen in our polls repeatedly, the American people are tired of all this and ready to get on with their lives. The U.S. Senate finally recognized this reality this week with the bipartisan passage of the bill to block President Biden's illegal vaccine mandate, and we're going to see more of this as we get closer to 2022 and elected officials fight to save their jobs."

In the week ending December 11, the Omicron variant accounted for 2.9 percent of sequences in COVID-19 cases nationwide. Scientists believe the newly detected variant will spread rapidly across the United States.

****Novavax vax 90% effective at preventing Covid infections***



Novavax's Covid-19 vaccine is 90 per cent effective at preventing Covid-19 illness, according to results from a Phase 3 clinical trial.

In addition to being highly effective in preventing Covid illness of any severity, the vaccine was 100 per cent effective in preventing moderate and severe disease that required hospitalization, revealed the study published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Moderna booster and omicron:

3 COVID vaccine doses protect better than 2. What to know today.



A year ago today, the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine was authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration. On Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explained how a third shot of the vaccine protects better than two shots versus the emerging omicron variant of COVID-19.

During a White House briefing on Friday, Dr. Anthony Fauci, chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden, discussed several recent studies offering support for COVID-19 vaccine booster shots. Regarding omicron, Fauci presented data from a preliminary study by the National Institutes of Health demonstrating that boosters of the Moderna vaccine offer 19 times more neutralizing protection against the omicron variant compared to two shots.

Fauci ended his remarks Friday: "It is critical to get vaccinated. If you are vaccinated, it is critical for optimal protection to get boosted."

Omicron has pushed talk of a COVID booster to the top of the page. As of Saturday, almost 26 million people in the US have received the Moderna vaccine booster, according to the CDC. On Thursday, a CDC advisory committee also took the bold step of recommending the mRNA vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer (Comirnaty) over the Johnson & Johnson viral vector vaccine for booster shots.

The CDC's mRNA vaccine recommendation and focus on boosters follows news that two doses of the Moderna vaccine may not be enough to protect against the omicron variant. That NIH study released Wednesday found that two doses of the Moderna vaccine were 50 times less effective at protecting

against the omicron variant compared to previous COVID variants.

"The omicron variant undoubtedly compromised the effects of a two-dose mRNA vaccine-induced antibodies and reduces the overall protection," said Fauci, during a White House briefing on Wednesday. Studies of US cases of the omicron variant appear to support the concern about weakened protection for those who are fully vaccinated with two doses of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines or one of J&J's. Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, CDC director, said last week that 80% of confirmed US cases with the mutated virus had already been fully vaccinated against the disease. One-third of the cases had also received a booster, although some may have not been boosted in time to be fully protected before being infected with the omicron variant.

Scientists are still learning about the omicron variant, including how easily it can pass between people, how serious an infection it can cause and if it can evade immunity. As of Dec. 10, according to Jeff Zients, White House COVID-19 response coordinator, the US is administering 1.1 million booster shots a day, the most since May. The jump comes as the White House is stressing the need for COVID-19 vaccine heading into winter, including booster shots. (Biden's campaign also includes "free" at-home COVID-19 test kits and stricter rules for international travelers.)

Research is showing booster shots from Moderna and Pfizer could help slow COVID-19's spread, reducing hospitalization and deaths, as the effects of the vaccine weaken over time. The CDC urges booster shots for anyone over 18 six months after their second dose of Moderna or Pfizer, or two months after getting a single Johnson & Johnson dose.

The COVID-19 vaccines have proven so far to be highly effective in preventing hospitalization. People who are unvaccinated are 10 times more likely to be hospitalized if infected. With the federal vaccine mandate halted by a court order, Biden is turning to other measures to get booster shots administered. The

government has also ordered 13 million courses of antiviral drugs in anticipation of higher caseloads this winter.

Here's what you need to know about the Moderna booster, including doses, side effects and how to get a free ride. For more details, here's the latest on COVID-19 vaccines for kids, how you can get a free COVID-19 test kit soon and what to know about breakthrough infections.

Is the Moderna booster effective against the omicron variant?

According to a study released on Wednesday, Moderna's booster was highly effective at blocking the virus, NPR reported. Moderna CEO Nour Afeyan told Fox News last week, "Our expectation ... is that a boosted person will be protected, certainly against serious disease and hospitalization."

CNET asked Moderna for a comment but didn't immediately get a response.

Pfizer said early lab results suggest that the first two doses of its vaccine might not fully protect against the variant and three doses may be needed to restore those protections.

Will we need an omicron booster shot from Moderna?

Fauci on Wednesday said, "there is no need for a variant-specific booster" to protect against omicron. "The current boosters work to restore protection," he said.

Moderna said it is working on an omicron-specific booster vaccine, along with testing a COVID-19 vaccine that could protect against several mutated strains of the coronavirus, in case a variant-specific vaccine is needed. As part of its booster testing, Moderna is also investigating whether a 100-microgram dose of its booster provides better protection against the omicron variant -- in other words, a third dose rather than a half dose as the booster is currently formulated.

If Moderna needs to make a new vaccine modified for the variant, it could be available early in 2022.

When is it time to get a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot?

If you got Moderna or Pfizer, six months after the date of your second shot listed on your vaccination

card is when you're eligible to receive your booster dose. The CDC and other health authorities are now urging you to get your booster as soon as you're eligible, to keep your immune response against omicron, delta and other coronavirus variants as strong as possible. Two months after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is the time for a booster.

On Dec. 2, Biden also outlined a plan for Medicare to contact the 64 million people it serves and for AARP to reach out to its 38 million senior members. Pharmacies like Walgreens, CVS and RiteAid should also contact people who got a vaccine at their retail stores when it's time to schedule another dose.

Should people who are pregnant get a booster shot?

The COVID-19 booster recommendations apply to all people 18 years and older, including those who are pregnant. In fact, the CDC urges pregnant people to get a COVID-19 vaccine -- and a booster is half a full vaccine dose.

"People who are pregnant or recently pregnant are more likely to get severely ill with COVID-19 compared with people who are not pregnant," the CDC says on its website.

A recent study also linked COVID-19 infection in pregnant people to higher risk of stillbirth. However, there is no evidence that getting vaccinated decreases fertility in women or men.

Is the Moderna booster shot a third dose?

Booster shots of COVID-19 vaccines are currently half doses of the same vaccine used in the first two full shots. The goal is to top up the vaccine formula that reinforces the body's immune response against the virus and its variants. The Moderna booster authorized by the CDC is a 50-microgram dose, while the first two shots were each 100 micrograms.

Moderna is also working on a combination shot that contains this year's flu vaccine and its COVID-19 booster vaccine, but that's not available right now.

How do I know which pharmacies have Moderna appointments?

Boosters are available at roughly 80,000 places across the country, including over 40,000 local pharmacies. Some 90% of Americans have a vaccine site within 5 miles of where they live. A [terrific free service](#) in conjunction with the CDC sends you

information when you text your ZIP code to this number: **438829**. The response will show you COVID-19 vaccine locations in your area, along with the brand they carry for certain age groups, for instance, Moderna 18+. This can save you the trial and error of calling around, or showing up to your appointment to find that your booster of choice isn't available. The text can also give you a shortcut to make your appointment right from your phone screen.

You can also check [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to see which vaccines are available where, and call **800-232-0233** for vaccine information.

How can I get a free ride to get my booster shot?

Lyft and Uber are offering free rides for some people who need them. An easy way to access those links for more information is through the text feature above. You can also go to [Lyft.com/vax](https://www.lyft.com/vax) or call Uber at: 855-921-0033.

Who can get a Moderna booster shot right now?

On Nov. 19, all US adults -- those ages became eligible to receive COVID-19 booster shots. They qualify if it's been at least six months since they've received a second dose of either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine.

Those who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are eligible for a booster dose after two months. Adults are encouraged to get whatever booster dose is available to them, even if that means mixing and matching vaccine boosters (more below), in other words, getting a different booster shot than their original vaccination.

What are the side effects of Moderna's booster?

According to the CDC, those who got the Moderna booster dose reported fewer reactions than they did after the second dose of the vaccine. In its study, the CDC found 95% of those who got Moderna for the first round of vaccine shots chose Moderna for the booster dose.

Is it safe to mix and match vaccine and booster brands?

Yes.

The US Food and Drug Administration has authorized mixing COVID-19 boosters, which in the US means Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

Any adult eligible for a booster can get any of the available brands of coronavirus vaccines. If you initially received Johnson & Johnson and it's been two months or longer since you received the initial dose, you'll be able to get the Moderna or Pfizer booster. If you received Moderna or Pfizer for your first two shots, you could pick any authorized vaccine available to you -- including J&J -- if you qualify and it's been six months or longer since your second shot. Is the Moderna COVID-19 booster shot still free?

All booster shots will be free, regardless of immigration or health insurance status. However, depending on where you get your booster shot -- for example, at a local pharmacy -- you may be asked to log your insurance status. You may be asked to provide your insurance card information, including your name, date of birth and membership number. You will not be charged for your COVID-19 vaccine or booster shot.

Will I need another COVID-19 booster shot?

The CDC updated its guidance to say that in 2022, some immunocompromised people will be able to get a fourth COVID-19 booster shot. It's unclear if other groups will need to get a fourth dose at this time, but guidance could change in light of the omicron variant.

For more on coronavirus treatments and vaccines, here's what we know about monoclonal antibody treatments, the new federal vaccine mandates and why some people may not want the shot.

What does the Moderna booster shot do?

A COVID-19 booster shot -- whether from Moderna, Pfizer or Johnson & Johnson -- tops off your immune response and guards against a breakthrough COVID-19 infection as the vaccine's effectiveness decreases over time.

Recent studies of the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines show that their effectiveness can begin to wane after six months. Moderna said early data suggests that those who received the Moderna vaccine in 2020 are showing a higher rate of breakthrough COVID-19 infections than those vaccinated this year, suggesting the need for a booster to maintain high levels of protection.

OVID19: Weekly Update.

The numbers below are from
Saturday 12-18-2021 * 3 pm US East coast Time...

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South Asian Media Network Inc., USA.

*There are likely false data & variations in data most of the time, so,
Please use the data wisely. Details are compiled from various sources.*

Marked "" are not reliable data.*

World:

274,270,290. Cases. /5,364,544. Deaths.

Recovered till today:

246,181,890.

01. U.S. A.:

51,611,479. Cases. /826,719. Deaths.

02. India** (???)

34,733,194. Cases. / 477,158. Deaths.

03. Brazil:

22,209,020. Cases. /617,647. Deaths.

04. UK:

11,279,428. Cases. /147,173. Deaths.

27. Canada.

1,874,265. Cases. /30,038. Deaths.

00 (India): Gujarat* : (???)

828,495. (???) Cases. /10,101. (???) Deaths.

USA States:

01. California:

5,067,329. Cases./ 75,935. Deaths

02. Texas*:

4,418,358. Cases. /75,385. Deaths.

03. Florida:

3,786,745. Cases / 62,192. Deaths.

04. New York*:

3,016,444. Cases / 59,032. Deaths.

05. Illinois:

1,944,056. Cases. / 30,202. Deaths.

06. Pennsylvania:

1,874,155. Cases. / 35,183. Deaths.

07. Ohio:

1,829,367.(???) Cases / 28,028. Deaths.

08. Georgia:

1,691,674. Cases / 30,994. Deaths.

12. New Jersey*:

1,330,728. Cases. / 28,675. Deaths.

17. Massachusetts:

1,005,470. Cases. / 19,829. Deaths.

34. Connecticut:

455,566. Cases /9,002. Deaths.



COVID19: DOS AND DON'TS.

****Omicron virus with 30+variant is around and new situation we will face. Please be extrim careful and follow the Guidelines announced time to time by the compitant Authorities.***

***More than 4** Covid19 vaccines are available now nationwide in the US. Find out how to get yours.

**** Children of age group 5yrs to 11yrs can have their Vaccins, parents please take a serious note of it, and get your kids vaccinated as soon as possible.***

**** The 3rd booster dose (for Pfizer, Moderna, also a second booster for Jhonsons'.) are available now.***

****More serious Delta and Delta Plus (Indian), Lambda, now Kappa, Mue and now a Japanies verients are around & can create an another pendamic, so be careful & follow religeously the Guidelines given by the Medical Authorities.***

* Finally Vaccine is available all time in the US; India and many parts of world, many of us got both the doses, or single dose in case of Jhonson & Jhonson's vaccine. Yet post vaccination results/effects are not known to the research/medico community fully. We are still in a Pandemic Period, of Phase 2 and 3, also possible invasion of new 4 or more strains of UK, Brazil, South Africa, and now India Coronavirus.

* Entering the new wave of Delta and Delta Plus and three other virus varients, the number of cases are still on a higher side, yet to achive the flat curve, world over most of us are just ignoring the pandemic do's & don'ts, particularly when we are with festivity mode in Summer days of 2021, so please take Extreme Care, Stay Safe & Stay Home. Yet not an easy time for every one! * Corona is still around, & may remain lifelong! It's not as simple as viral flu. It's as dangerous as like a contest of survival of the fittest.

* Vaccine third does is available now, first to the frontline medico fraternity, patients in need, & nursing home/long term care facilities residents on a priority, so be careful & protect yourself & your loved ones for good. Mask, frequent hand wash with soap & social distancing only is the option for now

*** Now Mask is not needed in most of the USA, if you are vaccinated. But it is advised one must use Mask, even if you have taken Covid shots, Vaccine is just protection, it's not a cure!** Also wear Gloves, Sunglasses & the most important: keep safe distance, keep washing your hands frequently with soap or use reliable sanitizer either one at least for 30 seconds.

**** In India nasal steam (Naas) is recommended by the Government authorities, Ayurvedic practitioners, & also is a traditional remedy, but the US CDC and other Western Health Authorities doesn't recommend it due to a probable risk to the brain.***

**** If you can, use Mouth Rinse, twice a day, will help to boost your oral health.***

**** If you have young kids/minors attending the school or college, it's advised to put on the mask for everyone inside the home.***

* We are passing through a tough time of Life & Death. Follow Social Distancing, but stay in for Social Contacts. If you know any one suffering with Corona, your nearer or dearer, call and talk to them frequently, we don't know whether they will return safely with us. Call other relatives/friends, at least ten persons a week. We are social & want to take care of those who are cut off due to Corona self-imposed lockdowns. Also keep busy yourself & family members with plenty of daily activities like yog, exercise & Stay Physically Fit, Pursue Your Hobby, Get Adequate, at least 6 to 8 hrs. of Sleep, & Eat Healthy Balance Diet.

**** Yet it's a long march to finish, no one knows when we will...!!!!***

Take care, & Stay Safe.