

## **An update on the COVID-19 variants and how you can protect yourself and your loved ones**

As you have likely heard, we have a new, rapidly developing situation caused by the COVID-19 Omicron variant. As your health care team, we are closely monitoring it. During the past week we have seen the rapid impact of this variant that now accounts for more than 53% of all identified COVID-19 cases in Kaiser Permanente Southern California, with the remainder the Delta variant. We expect Omicron numbers to continue to climb quickly over the next few weeks.

### **Delta, Omicron, and the flu**

The Omicron variant appears to be significantly more contagious than the Delta variant, although it is unclear at this time whether Omicron causes severe illness. COVID-19 vaccinations continue to reduce the risk of both developing severe symptoms and causing death, regardless of the variant. For Omicron, it is especially important also to get a booster vaccination.

In addition to COVID-19, we are also seeing a large increase in flu cases across the United States and Southern California. It's important for each of us to do all we can to protect ourselves against this "twin-demic" of COVID plus flu, especially as we gather to celebrate the holidays.

### **What can you do to protect yourself and your loved ones?**

To help keep you, your family and friends safe, we strongly recommend the following:

1. **Get your COVID-19 [vaccine series](#) and your booster shot.** Booster shots are now recommended for everyone 16 years and older.
  - a. For individuals who received Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna as their vaccine series, boosters should be given 6 months after receiving the second shot.
  - b. For individuals who received the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine, boosters should be given 2 months after receiving the single shot.
2. **Get your [flu shot](#),** in addition to the COVID-19 vaccine and booster shots and please encourage your family and friends to do the same.
3. **Get tested** if you're having any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. Our current tests will identify all currently known variants including the Omicron strain.
4. **Continue to wear a mask** when you are indoors, in crowded places including outdoors, or whenever you cannot socially distance.
5. **Stay home if you are sick.**

Thank you for your ongoing resilience as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Together, we will get through this.

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