



NEWS

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For Immediate Release

COVID-19: What You Need to Know Today

***We know you want to do the right thing.
Here are common questions and the answers as of today:***

Omicron is the name given to a variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The emergence of the Omicron variant in late 2021 has stressed the local, state and national health care systems.

This is a confusing time. We are providing information below to the best of our ability that is current as of today, Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022.

What are the symptoms of the Omicron variant?

The [symptoms of infection](#) by the original coronavirus, the Delta variant and Omicron are similar: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, muscle pain. Medical professionals and scientists are working to discern differences between the variants.

There remain many unknowns. "While there is still a lot we don't know about Omicron, vaccines and boosters are effective at preventing severe disease and limiting transmission of the virus," said San Mateo County Health Officer Dr. Scott Morrow.

"The best way to track and treat COVID-19 cases – whether the Delta or Omicron variants – is through testing. Testing is absolutely essential for all of us."

To help prevent the spread, health officials continue to urge vaccination including boosters and require the wearing of masks in public indoor settings, regardless of vaccination status.

I have symptoms, now what do I do?

The first step is to stay home from work or school.

The next step is to get tested.

You should immediately get tested for COVID-19 if you are feeling any symptoms – regardless of your vaccination status. COVID-19 symptoms can feel like a common cold (including just “the sniffles”), seasonal allergies or flu.

Tests can tell you if you are currently infected with COVID-19.

I came into close contact with someone who now has COVID-19. What do I do?

Get tested, even if you are fully vaccinated.

The California Department of Public Health [recommends](#) that anyone who comes into contact with someone who has, or is suspected of having, COVID-19 should get tested on day 5 after exposure.

If you are fully vaccinated and boosted, or fully vaccinated but not yet eligible for a booster, you do not need to quarantine (stay home and away from other people for at least five days), but you should isolate if you develop symptoms or receive a positive test result.

Persons who are not vaccinated or are vaccinated and eligible for a booster but have not received it should stay home for at least 5 days, after their last contact with a person who has COVID-19, and test on day 5.

You should quarantine if you are in one of the following groups:

- You have completed the primary series of a recommended vaccine and are eligible for a booster but have not received it
- You received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine (completing the primary series) over 2 months ago and have not received a recommended booster shot
- You are not vaccinated or have not completed a primary vaccine series

What are the two different tests? Does it matter which test I take?

Two types of tests are commonly available:

- Rapid antigen tests
- PCR tests

Antigen test: What is it?

An [antigen test](#) directly detects fragments of proteins from the COVID-19 virus.

Why use Antigen tests?

- Easy to perform almost anywhere with a non-invasive nose swab
- Provide results quickly
- Good at confirming suspected COVID infections in people who are already sick

Concerns with antigen tests

- More effective for people when currently experiencing COVID-19 symptoms
- More likely to have a “false negative” result: a negative antigen test result may need a follow-up PCR test in people who have COVID-19 symptoms

When should antigen tests be used?

You should use an antigen test when:

- You need to determine quickly if someone who appears sick has COVID-19
- You are in an area where access to PCR testing is limited
- If there is limited PCR testing capacity and you are in a high-risk setting where regular, frequent testing is recommended (nursing homes, other congregate care facilities)

PCR test: What is it?

PCR stands for polymerase chain reaction. The [PCR test](#) amplifies and then detects the presence of COVID-19 virus’ genetic material.

Why use PCR tests?

PCR is the preferred test for diagnosing COVID infections for people who are sick and in people who aren’t experiencing any COVID symptoms.

Concerns about PCR tests

- Conventional PCR tests must be processed in a lab, which can mean waiting a up to 72 hours or more between having the test done and getting a result

PCR testing is available at [County-operated sites](#), pharmacies such as [CVS](#), [Walgreens](#) and others and testing providers such as [Curative](#) and [Virus Geeks](#).

Learn more about testing and contact tracing from [San Mateo County Health](#).

Do not go to an emergency department or urgent care for testing

Hospital emergency departments and other urgent care facilities are not testing centers. Do not seek urgent care for testing.

Are at-home test results reported to local public health officials?

No.

At-home antigen test results are not typically reported to public health agencies, nor are they usually included in official case tallies. This means testing and positive-case statistics are significantly under-reported.

I got tested (because of symptoms or close contact) but won't get results back for another 24 to 72 hours. What should I do while I wait?

You should self-isolate, staying home from work or school, while you wait for your results.

What's the latest on face coverings/masks?

The California Department of Public Health and the County of San Mateo are requiring masks to be worn in all indoor public settings, irrespective of vaccine status.

For additional information on types of masks, the most effective masks, and ensuring a well-fitted mask, the state refers people to

- 1) [CDPH Get the Most out of Masking](#)
- 2) [CDPH Masking Guidance Frequently Asked Questions](#)