

News Release

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Getting a COVID-19 Booster More Important Than Ever With Omicron Spreading Quickly

Current vaccines expected to continue strong protection against serious illness and death

PHOENIX — The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) is urging Arizonans to get their COVID-19 booster dose as soon as they can because of the rapid spread nationally of the Omicron variant and the potential for more breakthrough cases among vaccinated people. Those who have yet to be vaccinated also should act now to get the protection offered by safe, free, and highly effective COVID-19 vaccines.

“There is every indication that vaccines will continue offering significant protection against severe illness and death from COVID-19 as this extraordinarily contagious variant spreads,” said Don Herrington, interim director of ADHS. “Boosters are important for everyone who is eligible, but they are especially important for older people who are more prone to severe illness from breakthrough infections.”

Boosters are strongly recommended for everyone 18 and older at least six months after receiving the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine and at least two months after the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine. For ages 16 and 17, boosters are recommended at least six months after the Pfizer vaccine.

About three-quarters of eligible Arizonans have yet to get a booster dose. Of greatest concern among that group are the 56% of those 65 and older who are eligible but have yet to get a booster. Meanwhile, about one in three eligible Arizonans has yet to be vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that the Omicron variant represented 73% of new COVID-19 cases across the U.S. last week, though the extent of its spread in Arizona isn't clear at this time. As of Monday, whole genome sequencing had identified 30 cases of Omicron in Arizona, accounting for 1.63% of samples sequenced.

For those who have yet to be vaccinated, the rapid spread of Omicron nationally is another reason to roll up your sleeve. As it overtakes the highly contagious Delta variant, Omicron could further strain hospitals already struggling with large numbers of COVID-19 patients, the vast majority of whom are unvaccinated.

“This is an especially bad time to allow misinformation, political views, or stubbornness to keep you from getting vaccinated,” said Dr. Richard Carmona, 17th U.S. Surgeon General and special adviser to Governor Doug Ducey on public health emergency preparedness. “Any hospital will tell you that the vast majority of those in intensive care and dying from COVID-19 are not vaccinated.”

As of October, unvaccinated individuals in Arizona were 15.2 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than the fully vaccinated and 3.9 times more likely to test positive for COVID-19.

There are hundreds of places to get a COVID-19 vaccine or booster dose at no cost to you. To find a location, please visit azhealth.gov/FindVaccine or call the bilingual COVID-19 Hotline at 844.542.8201 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. every day except holidays.

While vaccines offer the surest protection against COVID-19, ADHS continues to recommend that Arizonans, vaccinated or not, continue taking steps proven to reduce the spread:

- Stay home and do not host gatherings if you are sick.
- Wear a mask covering your mouth and nose and maintain physical distance in public indoor settings, including when you gather with those you don't live with.
- Get tested if you have symptoms or five to seven days after exposure to someone who has or who you suspect has COVID-19.
- If in doubt about whether you have COVID-19, consider using an at-home rapid antigen test before you gather with relatives and friends.
- Keep your hands thoroughly washed or sanitized.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines, please visit azhealth.gov/COVID19Vaccines. For more information on other ways to protect yourself and others please visit azhealth.gov/COVID-19.