KISH P&I CLUB

Omicron Variant & 11 Questions for Clarification

The omicron variant of COVID-19 is spreading more rapidly than other strains of the virus because it has more mutations than any other variant so far. Many of the mutations are in the spike protein, which relates to how the virus is spread.
The highly contagious COVID-19 variant is causing an increase in cases and a high demand for testing. If you have been exposed to someone with the virus or have COVID-19 symptoms and are waiting for a test or your results, stay home and isolate from others.

The following 11 Questions & Answers are devised to clarify this issue.

1-What are the symptoms, Are they different than other variations?

All of the variants, including delta and omicron, cause similar COVID-19 symptoms, including cough, fever and fatigue. There is some evidence that fewer people with omicron lose their taste and smell. Omicron is also less likely to cause severe disease such as pneumonia that may require treatment in the hospital.
In fully vaccinated and/or boosted people, omicron symptoms tend to be mild. In unvaccinated people, symptoms may be quite severe, possibly leading to hospitalization or even death.
Omicron is also more likely to cause symptoms even if you have been exposed or tested positive in the past.

2- How long the symptoms will last?

Most people who test positive with any variant of COVID-19 typically experience some symptoms for a couple weeks. People who have long COVID-19 symptoms can experience health problems for four or more weeks after first being infected, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
If you test positive for Covid, Everyone regardless of vaccination status shall stay isolated for 5 days.
If you have no symptoms or your symptoms are resolving after 5 days, you can leave your quarantine.
You shall continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days.
If you have a fever, continue to stay isolated until your fever resolves.

3-What is Variant BA.2, is it different than the original Omicron variant?

The new omicron variant BA.2 appears to be about 50% more transmissible than the original omicron strain BA.1. Preliminary data suggests omicron BA.1 causes the same severity of disease and symptoms, but it is affecting younger people more.
We do not know how common reinfection is, but there are reports that several people have been infected with omicron BA.1, and within a month infected with omicron BA.2. It appears that this

version of omicron is either so much more highly infectious that it can overcome vaccine or previous infection immunity, or it can evade immunity due to the mutations that it has.
To protect yourself, getting COVID-19 vaccines are still important. The second most important thing is masking. Wearing an N95 will provide the best protection against these new variants.

4-Will Omicron variant spread easier than other variants?

According to the CDC, omicron likely spreads more easily than the original COVID-19 virus. It appears to be much more contagious compared to the delta variant. The CDC said it expects that people can spread omicron even if they're vaccinated or don't have symptoms.

5-Are the already available vaccines effective against this variation?

Since the omicron variant is so new, health experts do not have a clear idea how effective the vaccines are in preventing illness. There's a potential that COVID-19 vaccines might not be as effective with new variants. However, the more antibodies a person has, the more protected they will be. That's why everyone is encouraged to get a COVID-19 booster shot once you're eligible.
Preliminary evidence suggests that vaccines are less effective against the spread of omicron, compared with delta. But vaccines still protect well against serious illness such as hospitalization.

6-Will Omicron variant cause more serious illness than other variation of Covid & hoe effective are the current vaccinations?

Omicron is more likely to cause less severe illness compared to other variants. For example, preliminary data suggest that infection with omicron results in hospitalization at about half the rate compared to infection with delta. Given how infectious omicron is, it is important for everyone to take all precautions, including getting vaccinated and wearing a mask.
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7-Are home test-kits helping in the Omicron surge?

At-home COVID tests, also known as rapid antigen tests, are useful because they provide quick results. Tests can be purchased without a prescription and are available at pharmacies and stores. If you've been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or are having symptoms, at-home tests can give you a good sense of whether or not you have an infection. These tests are pretty reliable, but they are not perfect.

- If you **have COVID-19 symptoms and test negative**, you still might have COVID-19 and should stay away from others.

- If you **have COVID-19 symptoms and test positive**, you can trust that positive result. You can always request a diagnostic or PCR test from your physician to confirm that result. If you test positive, isolate for at least five days, as recommended by the CDC.

8-Will wearing masks help in avoiding this variant, any different needs?

Omicron is incredibly infectious. Everyone should be masking (covering both the mouth and nose) when indoors around anyone not in their household and outdoors when in crowded settings. Several studies, indicate how effective masks can be in protecting yourself and others. It is important to remember that you may be asymptomatic and not know you are infected but still able to spread COVID-19. Wearing a mask in these situations helps protect vulnerable people you could unknowingly infect.
Health experts are recommending that people upgrade their face masks to N95s or KN95s. It is difficult to estimate the protection from cloth masks since they are not standardized. Some studies suggest cloth masks are about 50% effective, compared to 60-70% for surgical masks and 95% for N95s. There is strong evidence that properly worn N95 masks are the most protective in terms of blocking transmission. Cloth masks alone are not very effective against the most transmissible variants like delta and omicron. If an N95 mask is not available, a surgical mask covered with a cloth mask can be very effective.

9-Do you really need to know if you are infected, even if it is not so serious?

Yes. It is important to know if you are infected with COVID-19 for three reasons:

1. If your illness gets worse, you will want to know so you can take advantage of COVID-19 treatments.
2. You need to know whether to isolate so you can reduce your chances of infecting others, especially those who are more vulnerable to severe COVID-19.
3. You will want to notify anyone you were recently in contact with so they can monitor their symptoms and get tested if needed.

10-If you are already vaccinated and have no signs of Covid but exposed to the infection, should you be tested?

Most likely. Unfortunately, omicron is so easily spread that even those who are fully vaccinated and boosted may get the illness. If you know you had contact with an infected person, particularly in a higher-risk situation (such as an indoor space for a longer period with others who were not masked), testing is advised. You should also quarantine, watch for COVID-19 symptoms, stay away from others in your home, and wear a mask. If you test positive, then you should isolate.

11-How long before symptoms are observed, you are contagious? & What we learn from This variant?

Although it can vary, people are generally contagious between 1-3 days before omicron symptoms show. The more people who are infected, the more likely we are to see new variants. The message from health experts remains that everyone should be vaccinated against COVID-19. Every time COVID-19 infects someone, there is a chance for more mutations, which can allow the virus to keep spreading. Stay vigilant and get vaccinated if you are not already.