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Latest Covid-19 Update: Active Infections Top 2,000

Coronavirus / **Published On January 14, 2022 06:02 AM /**

Staff Consortium **January 14, 2022**

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The V.I. Dept. of Health's Thursday Covid-19 data [revealed](#) an edging up of active cases. According to the department, cases increased to 2,169 from Wednesday's 1,960, a difference of 209 active infections.

St. Croix accounted for 1,024, followed by St. Thomas with 964, and St. John with 181. The seven-day positivity rate fell to 16.18 percent.

On Wednesday, St. Croix accounted for 943 cases, followed by St. Thomas with 862, and St. John with 155.

Two weeks ago the Omicron variant was representing 90 percent of Covid-19 infections in the territory, according results from samples sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by the V.I. Dept of Health. Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion told the Consortium Monday

that an additional 200 samples had been sent to the CDC for testing and the department was awaiting the results.

There were eighteen patients hospitalized with Covid-19 territory-wide as of Monday, when active cases topped 3,000. Three of twelve were vented in St. Thomas and none of six on St. Croix. It was unclear what variant of Covid-19 the vented patients were infected with, however the number of hospitalizations is nowhere near the amount seen when the Delta variant was the dominant strain and active cases [hovered around 250, while hospitalizations arrived at 29](#). The situation was so severe that Governor Bryan was [mulling a vaccine mandate or weekly testing for government employees](#).

In the U.S., Omicron is now accounting for 98 percent of all cases according to the CDC, pushing out the deadlier Delta variant. The good news is hospitalizations associated with the variant isn't nearly as high as with other strains of Covid-19.

The CDC on Dec. 27 shortened isolation for some Covid-19 infections as Omicron upended the workplace both in the private and public sectors. The new guidelines are the same whether you are vaccinated, boosted, or unvaccinated: The federal health authority says persons must isolate for five days. If you have no symptoms after five days, you may leave isolation, but should wear a mask when in the presence of other people for five more days. If you have a fever, you should continue to stay home.

Additionally, the CDC says, "Do not go to places where you are unable to wear a mask, such as restaurants and some gyms, and avoid eating around others at home or work until a full 10 days after your first day of symptoms."

Meanwhile, fresh data continue to back earlier research that confirm the Omicron variant's mild nature. Laboratory studies suggest that Omicron's weakness is tied to its tendency to flourish in upper respiratory tract cells rather than the lungs, where the coronavirus can lead to potentially deadly breathing problems.

"It spreads very, very fast, but it doesn't appear to have the virulence or machismo to really pack as much of a wallop as the Alpha or Delta variants," said James Musser (via the Wall Street Journal), chairman of Houston Methodist Hospital's pathology and genomic medicine department and the leader of a new study of Omicron infections.

The variant also has a high vaccination breakthrough rate, infecting more inoculated individuals than variants before it. "Omicron very rapidly increased in only three weeks to cause 90 percent of all new Covid-19 cases," reads [a summary on the study](#). It says the virus had "significantly increased vaccine breakthrough rates," and those infected were "significantly less likely to be hospitalized."

"Omicron patients required less intense respiratory support and had a shorter length of hospital stay, consistent with decreased disease severity. Although the number of Omicron patients we studied is relatively small, in the aggregate the data document the unusually rapid spread and increased occurrence of Covid-19 caused by the Omicron variant in metropolitan Houston, and provide information about disease character," reads the summary.

Another recent study from the University of Cambridge and the University of Hong Kong provided results showing Omicron prefers infecting cells in the bronchi — tubes connecting the windpipe to the lungs. The Delta variant, however, infects and multiplies in the lung tissue.

“Lower-airway replication is a pathway or a reason for severe disease, and we may have a situation where a virus is taking us towards a less severe disease outcome,” said Ravindra Gupta (via [WSJ](#)), a University of Cambridge virologist who was involved in the research.

A research whose study was [published online on Dec. 29](#) ahead of the study's peer review, showed that animals infected with Omicron had less severe virus outcomes than those infected with earlier variants.

The new findings support earlier studies performed in South Africa, where the variant was first detected late November; in the United Kingdom, where it has spread rapidly, and in Scotland.

Yet even with the trove of data, scientist have yet to answer some important questions about Omicron, including how it defers in symptomatic vaccinated and unvaccinated patients, and in those who received immunity from prior infection. According to WSJ, early reports suggest that infection caused by Omicron in those who received immunity from prior infection was milder.

According to recent studies of clinical data by Dr. Musser and other researchers, people infected with Omicron are less likely to need hospitalization or intensive care compared those who have the Delta variant.