



Public Health Emergency Response
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Omicron Variant Detected in Missoula County

On Dec. 21, Fyr Diagnostics, the lab that processes and sequences the Missoula City-County Health Department's COVID-19 tests, detected the Omicron variant. The individual infected with the variant was tested at MCCHD. Case investigation is pending, and it is unknown at this time if the individual contracted the variant through travel or community spread. Due to the highly contagious nature of this variant, the health department encourages citizens to take precautions and assume the variant is circulating in the community.

Also Tuesday, President Biden told the nation that "we should all be concerned about Omicron but not panicked," and health officials in Missoula agree.

"Thankfully, we know what actions can limit the spread of this variant. It's just a matter of members of our community practicing these commonsense mitigation measures to protect one another," explains Health Officer D'Shane Barnett.

COVID-19 Incident Commander Cindy Farr added, "So far, data show the vaccines still provide good protection against severe illness due to omicron. We highly encourage everyone to get their boosters or start their vaccine series if they have not done so already."

The health department recommends individuals practice the following as well:

- Get boosted immediately or start your vaccines series if you have not done so already.
- Wear a mask at all times in public and stay distanced from others.
- Keep your social circle to 10 friends or fewer. Consider only hanging out with individuals who are outside of your immediate household in well ventilated areas and keep your masks on.
- Wash your hands frequently with hot soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your face as much as possible.
- Stay home if you are sick and seek COVID-19 testing.

For COVID-19 testing appointments, Missoula County citizens should call 406-258-INFO.