

# Omicron: New SARS-CoV-2 Variant

## What is Omicron?

Omicron is a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. CDC is working with other U.S. and global partners to learn more about this variant, as we continue to monitor its path. CDC is continuously monitoring variants and the U.S. variant surveillance system has reliably detected new variants in this country. Omicron was first detected in the United States on December 1, 2021, in a traveler who had returned to California from South Africa on November 22, 2021. As we learn more, we should continue to take steps to slow the spread of all variants, which will help slow the spread of Omicron.

## Why is Omicron concerning?

Omicron is considered a [variant of concern \(VOC\)](#) in the United States and by the World Health Organization. Scientists are still working to better understand Omicron, how it spreads, whether vaccines protect against it, and how severe it is. We will update you as we learn more.

## How can I keep myself and others safe?

While there is still a lot we do not know about Omicron, we do know what [prevention strategies](#) help slow the spread of COVID-19, regardless of the virus variant.

- **Get vaccinated** – CDC recommends everyone 5 years or older protect themselves by getting [fully vaccinated](#). Everyone 18 years or older should also get a COVID-19 [vaccine booster dose when eligible](#).
- **Wear a mask** – Everyone 2 years or older should wear a mask in public indoor settings in areas of [substantial or high community transmission](#).
- **Keep your distance** - Stay at least 6 feet away from people outside your home and those within your home who are sick.
- **Increase ventilation** – Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces. Use the [interactive ventilation tool](#) to learn how to reduce virus particles in your home.
- **Test to prevent spread** – Consider using a [self-test](#) before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household.
- **Wash your hands often** – [Wash hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.