

Omicron Variant Highlights Importance of COVID-19 Vaccination, Booster Shots

Rep. McNerney, Contra Costa Health Services Host Vaccination Clinic in Oakley

Contra Costa is reemphasizing its efforts to vaccinate all residents 5 and older, and supply timely booster doses to eligible adults, after the emergence of a new, potentially more contagious COVID-19 variant overseas that has not yet reached the county.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) released a [fact sheet](#) on Sunday about Omicron, a variant first identified in South Africa on Nov. 24, and since designated a [Variant of Concern](#) by the World Health Organization (WHO).

“We do not yet know how infectious this variant is, or when it will appear in our community,” said Health Director Anna Roth, Contra Costa County. “What we do know is that getting vaccinated is the best protection we have today against COVID-19. We strongly encourage everyone get vaccinated and receive booster doses when eligible.”

COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and readily available in Contra Costa through community healthcare providers, drugstores and Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS). CCHS urges vaccination for [anyone who is 5 or older](#), and for adults to receive [booster doses](#) as soon as they are eligible.

CCHS and Congressman Jerry McNerney (CA-09) will host a no-cost vaccination clinic today from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Oakley Recreation Center, 1250 O’Hara Ave. in Oakley, to help promote community vaccination, particularly for recently eligible 5- to 11-year-old children. Appointments are not required, and anyone 5 or older can get a COVID-19 vaccine.

For a no-cost vaccination appointment at CCHS’ Antioch, Concord or Richmond clinics, [schedule online](#) or call 1-833-829-2626. CCHS also provides no-cost vaccination clinics at local schools, and mobile clinics at various locations and hours in the county, particularly in communities heavily impacted by the pandemic.

Wearing face coverings in indoor public spaces and staying home and getting a COVID-19 test whenever we have cold or flu symptoms are also health choices to reduce risk of becoming infected or spreading coronavirus.

Omicron is a variant of concern because scientists studying its genetic structure found that it mutated significantly from Delta and other COVID-19 variants, including in parts of the virus’s genome known in other variants to affect infectiousness and the ability of immune systems to protect from infection.

“This new variant is concerning because it has many mutations that may make it more contagious than prior variants of the COVID-19 virus,” said Dr. Ori Tzvieli, a deputy health officer for Contra Costa County. “We do not know at this time if Omicron causes more severe illness than other variants or how it might impact response to treatment.”

The U.S. has banned travel for non-U.S. citizens to or from eight African countries in the part of the world where Omicron was discovered. However, travel restrictions are likely to slow but not prevent the spread of this variant in the U.S. and California.

Visit cchealth.org/coronavirus for local information about COVID-19 and Contra Costa County’s response to the pandemic.