

Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer

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Dear Howard County Community,

Over the past several weeks, COVID cases and outbreaks in Howard County have begun to rise. Today's positivity rate is 10.31 and the case rate is 31.1/100,000. We attribute this surge to the Omicron BA.2 and BA.2.12.1 subvariants. These subvariants are more transmissible than previous variants but do not cause more severe disease in most people. The majority of outbreaks are occurring in childcare and school settings. Hospitalizations and deaths among persons diagnosed with COVID disease remain lower than previous surges.

More tools than ever before are available to prevent COVID-19 from placing strain on our community and healthcare system. With Howard County's high levels of vaccination, the risk of medically significant disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 is greatly reduced for most people. At the same time, we know that some people, are at higher risk for serious illness. Vaccination, masks, testing and physical distancing can help control the spread of disease. Vaccination, including boosters, can reduce severity of illness including hospitalization and death. Below are additional prevention actions you and your family can take.

- Wear a mask while indoors during times of increased COVID-19 cases in the community or in an outbreak setting, especially if you or a family member are at increased risk.
- Have a plan for testing by keeping some rapid antigen kits at home and staying aware of available [Howard County COVID-19 Testing Sites](#).
- Stay home if symptomatic and get tested with PCR or a rapid antigen test. If using a rapid antigen test and you test negative but are still symptomatic, repeat with another rapid antigen or PCR test.
- Test if exposed to someone with COVID-19 according to the [CDC COVID-19 Testing Guidelines](#).
- Quarantine after exposure to someone with COVID-19, if not up to date on vaccination.
- Isolate if positive or symptomatic (without another diagnosis or negative test).
- Follow [CDC Isolation and Quarantine Recommendations](#) for the duration of isolation and quarantine and wear a mask around others for 10 days.
- Contact your medical provider or go to <https://covid-19-test-to-treat-locator-dhhs.hub.arcgis.com/> regarding potential treatment if you test positive.
- Visit the [Howard County Vaccine Locator](#) to stay up to date with vaccines and boosters to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Thank you for your support and continued commitment to health.

Maura J. Rossman, MD

