

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

August 1, 2022

Dear Howard County Community,

Happy August! During the past month COVID case rates, test positivity, and new hospitalization admissions due to COVID have stabilized. We started the month with a high Community Level of COVID, and this week dropped to medium risk. As a reminder, [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) are categorized as low, medium, and high based on the number of COVID-19 cases in a given community and the impact of severe disease on community-based healthcare systems. Omicron subvariants known as BA.4 and BA.5 have spread quickly in Maryland and in Howard County. While new cases remain high, hospitalizations and deaths related to COVID are lower than in previous months. COVID-19 remains present in our community thus, we must continue with strategies to prevent severe illness and death.

Strategies such as vaccines, masking, testing, and medications are available throughout the community to mitigate the impact of severe disease. Vaccination remains the most effective strategy and now individuals 6 months and older are eligible. A new vaccine manufactured by Novavax will soon be available to individuals not previously vaccinated. Go to [www.howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19-vaccine](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19-vaccine) for more details. If you have a child under age 5, please check with your pediatrician about vaccinating your child. If more convenient, HCHD offers all authorized vaccines for residents 6 months and older. Visit the Howard County Vaccine page at [www.howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19-vaccine](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19-vaccine) to stay up to date with vaccines and boosters.

In addition to vaccination, the following COVID-19 layered prevention strategies to limit severe disease and reduce the potential for strain on the healthcare system are recommended, especially if traveling, participating in large events, or visiting family with health risks:

- Consider wearing a well-fitting mask indoors, regardless of vaccination status.
- If you are immunocompromised or high risk for severe disease:
  - Wear a mask that provides you with greater protection.
  - Consider avoiding non-essential indoor activities in public where you could be exposed.
  - Have a plan for rapid testing if needed, (e.g., having home tests or access to testing).
  - Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you are a candidate for treatments like oral antivirals, and monoclonal antibodies.
- If you have household or social contact with someone at high risk for severe disease
  - Consider self-testing to detect infection before contact.
  - Consider wearing a mask when indoors with them.
- Have a plan in case you or a family member become sick or get exposed:
  - Keep rapid antigen kits at home and stay aware of available [Howard County COVID-19 Testing Sites](#) and [Maryland Test to Treat sites](#).
  - Quarantine and mask after exposure to someone with COVID-19, per [CDC Isolation and Quarantine Recommendations](#).
  - Test if exposed to someone with COVID-19 according to the [CDC COVID-19 Testing Guidelines](#).
  - Stay home if symptomatic and get tested with a PCR or a rapid antigen test. If using a rapid antigen test and you test negative but are still symptomatic, continue to isolate and repeat with another rapid antigen or PCR test.

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- If you test positive, isolate per CDC guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>) and 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.

Thank you for your support and continued commitment to health,



Maura J. Rossman, MD  
Howard County Health Officer