MEDIA RELEASE

Lab testing confirms Orange County's first COVID-19 case involving Omicron variant

HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. December 17, 2021 — The Orange County Health Department has confirmed that a recent case of COVID-19 among an Orange County resident was caused by the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529). The person is at home in isolation, has mild symptoms and is fully vaccinated but had not yet received a booster.

Omicron arrives while the Delta variant continues to surge in Orange County. There have been 344 new cases of COVID-19 in the past two weeks, compared to 190 in the previous two weeks. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 Community Transmission Map, Orange County is experiencing substantial transmission.

Genomic sequencing was conducted at UNC Hospitals.

"The first case of Omicron is a reminder of the importance of vaccination, boosters, and general prevention strategies needed to protect against COVID-19," said Orange County Health Director Quintana Stewart. "Everyone 5 and older should get vaccinated and boosters are recommended for everyone 16 years and older."

Recommendations to Protect Against Omicron

Health officials urge the community to take the following steps to protect against COVID-19, including variants like Omicron:

- Get vaccinated and if eligible get a booster. Boosters for all residents ages 16 and up are currently available throughout Orange County. To find a convenient location visit vaccines.gov.
- Wear well-fitting masks in indoor public settings and crowded outdoor settings. Orange County continues to have an indoor mask mandate. The mandate applies to anyone 2 years and older, regardless of vaccination status.
- Get tested if you have symptoms, have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, have traveled as per guidelines or have been in a setting where you may have been exposed.

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Stay away from crowds.
- Improve ventilation in your home and workplace.
- Take extra care to avoid exposure to the virus if you have medical conditions or live with someone with medical conditions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends a booster for everyone 16 and up following the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's emergency use authorization for 16- and 17-year-olds to receive a Pfizer booster six months after the date of their second Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine dose.

About Omicron

On November 26, 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified a new variant, B.1.1.529, as a Variant of Concern and named it Omicron and on November 30, 2021, the United States also classified it as a Variant of Concern.

Related Links

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information on the Omicron variant: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/index.html

- Orange County Health Department's Guidance for Private Gatherings Website: https://www.orangecountync.gov/2565/Guidance-for-Private-Social-Gatherings

- Orange County Health Department's Face Coverings Website: https://www.orangecountync.gov/2435/Face-Coverings

- Orange County Health Department's COVID-19 Vaccine Website: https://www.orangecountync.gov/2617/Vaccine

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