



Chelan-Douglas Health District

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CDHD: Now is the time to prepare for Omicron

COVID variant is expected to cause high rates of infection this month

East Wenatchee, WA- The Chelan-Douglas Health District warns now is the time for the community to prepare for the fast-approaching impacts of the highly contagious COVID variant Omicron.

Based on facts that we currently know about Omicron and its rate of infection, we expect Omicron to gain momentum within our local communities in the coming weeks," said Dr. James Wallace, interim health officer for the Chelan-Douglas Health District (CDHD). "We should expect to see high rates of COVID infection for the month of January and into early February.

The health district, joined by health care providers from North Central Washington, held a press conference on Tuesday at the Town Toyota Center. Local press agencies attended as the event was streamed online for local leaders and on social media for the public.

"We are here today not to alarm the public but to raise awareness that we have an opportunity before us," Wallace said at the press conference. Now is the time to come together as a community so we can potentially lessen the impacts of the new COVID variant called Omicron on Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan counties".

Chelan County Commissioner Kevin Overbay, who is also chairman of the CDHD Health Board, called upon the community to be vigilant about following COVID safety protocols.

This is the most contagious form of COVID we have seen in the past two years, Overbay said after the press conference. While we watch Omicron impact our airlines and other businesses around the country, we need to work together at home to keep our community healthy for the continuity of essential services like grocery stores, utility providers, schools, road maintenance workers, health care facilities, government agencies and small businesses. If everyone is sick, our community won't be able to function as we have all come to expect.

The Wenatchee Valley recorded its first case of Omicron on Dec. 10. This past weekend, the area saw test positivity rates of 30 percent, Wallace said at the press conference. He compared Omicron to the Delta variant, which last August caused the highest spike in COVID infection rates ever in the region.

Among the differences:

- The Delta variant took about four months to peak in the area. Omicron should take about six weeks.
- The Omicron variant has about twice as many mutations as the Delta variant.
- The Delta variant doubled its infection rate about every two weeks. In communities around the nation, Omicron cases are doubling every two to four days.

CDHD Health Administrator Luke Davies said that the short incubation period of Omicron means its progression wave through the community will be about four to eight weeks.

“That means we must plan for many people in our community to get sick at the same time, potentially overwhelming our local medical centers and hospital”, Davies said”. “Department of Health projections show our statewide hospitalizations may be equal to or two to seven times higher than Delta per day at the peak of Omicron in our community”.

In response to Omicron, the health district and its partners are currently putting additional resources and strategies in place. The health district will work with local health care facilities and fire districts to set up a new testing site in north Wenatchee by early next week. CDHD is also working with a variety of community-based partners to make masks and at-home COVID tests available to the public.

And the CDHD and Confluence Health are setting up an Alternate Care Facility to support testing and triage over the next three weeks. An Emergency Operation Center also will be established at Wenatchee Valley College.

“Omicron is hitting when our health care systems already are short staffed and local health care workers are exhausted after dealing with pandemic conditions for two years”, Davies said at the press conference.

He stressed that local citizens can play a role in lessening the strain of Omicron on their own households as well as the local health care system by following COVID safety protocols:

- Get a COVID vaccination or your booster shot. More information about testing sites is at www.cdhd.wa.gov.
- Consider getting a flu shot to avoid a potential trip to the hospital.
- Wear a mask in public places or when socializing with people outside your household.
- Consider using a disposable mask for the remainder of the winter. Cloth masks worn over a number of days may spread the virus if you touch your hands to it.
- Follow CDC quarantine guidelines, which are available at www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s1227-isolation-quarantine-guidance.html.

For more information about COVID, including safety measures, local vaccination clinics and up-to-date information, go to the CDHD website at www.cdhd.wa.gov.



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