

DECEMBER 19, 2021

This is the latest communication from our Public Health Nurse, Amy Hardt;

This week's dashboard shows a dip in local cases last week, partly explained by a reduction in tests administered. **Buried within that dip, however, on December 6<sup>th</sup> Berkshire County hit its highest-ever reported daily new cases since January 2021.** And whatever our most recent numbers may be, what we really need to pay attention to our surrounding landscape:

- Past 2 weeks – both MA and NY cases increased by 50+%
- Past 2 weeks – MA hospitalizations and deaths increased by 50%; in NY by 25%
- Past 2 weeks – Significantly higher case rates in Columbia, Hampshire, Hampden & Litchfield counties
- On Dec 04 – MDPH announced the first case of Omicron in Massachusetts
- On Dec 15 – CDC estimated Omicron's presence as 13% of new cases in NY and NJ
- On Dec 16 – NYC reported highest # of new cases in one day since Jan 2021

Omicron has been detected in Massachusetts, and is likely already here in Berkshire County . Delta is still here but will quickly give way to Omicron. Both of them cause infection in people who have had COVID already, and even in those who are fully vaccinated. Boosted people are most protected right now. Because Omicron replicates a lot faster than Delta, household spread will occur quickly. Out in the community, many of us will end up spreading the Omicron variant of COVID before symptoms even appear.

Who is most at risk from COVID right now?

- Unvaccinated individuals of all ages, esp. those who have not been infected yet (0-4 year-olds are being hospitalized at a 20% higher rate with Omicron over Delta in South Africa)
- Immunocompromised individuals, regardless of vaccination status
- Seniors (65+ year-olds have accounted for 69% of breakthrough infections requiring hospitalization in the U.S. so far)
- Individuals with significant underlying health conditions, regardless of vaccination status
- Anyone who winds up needing hospital care – high infection levels and staff burnout have reduced staffing levels

**Recommended actions:**

- Get tested the morning of holiday get-togethers. Order at-home tests now if you cannot purchase them locally. Register for a BHS testing site or pharmacy appointment or sign up for a free, rapid drive-thru test Dec. 22-23 and Dec. 29-30 in Lee or Sheffield. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F44ACA72AA0FBC07-binaxnow>
- Stay home if anyone in your household (or your ex's household, if the kids go back and forth) or close friends/coworkers have had symptoms or tested positive in the past 2 weeks. Err on the side of caution.
- If you do get together with other households over the holiday, wear masks indoors, crack the windows and don't overcrowd the room
- Avoid eating and drinking indoors with individuals from outside your own household

Mask on! Vax & Booster on! Test on!