



Town of New Castle, NH
Settled 1623
Incorporated 1693

COVID Update December 20, 2021

It is the holiday season and a year later (after we have had the ability to be vaccinated), I did not expect to be writing again about a surge in cases or an expected upcoming “COVID Blizzard.” This “Blizzard” is preventable through vaccination.

We all have pandemic fatigue, but please, please, please be vaccinated, boosted, and thoughtful of others in the community by adhering to community mitigation practices. Cases and hospitalizations are at unsustainable levels and many people in our state are dying.

A) Variants-

Delta is no longer the predominant variant in the US. Omicron now accounts for between 72-90% of new cases nationwide whereas it was 3% of cases last week. Officials from some New Hampshire hospitals recently reported about 70% or more of hospitalizations are people who are not vaccinated.

B) What you can do:

Again, there are several things you can do (if you haven't already) to decrease your risk of severe COVID, hospitalization, and death.

1. **Get immunized.** All people ages 5 and up are recommended to get immunized.
2. **Get the booster shot.** It is available for everyone age 16 and up (16 and 17 year olds can have the Pfizer booster). **THE BOOSTER IS VERY IMPORTANT WITH OMICRON**
3. **Practice community mitigation measures.** This includes masking indoors, washing hands frequently, not being within 6 feet of people without masks for more than 15 minutes cumulatively, staying home if you are ill, and home testing if you feel ill or before any group gatherings.

Initial vaccines and boosters can be scheduled at:

www.vaccines.gov

or

www.Vaccines.nh.gov

The state (NH) has opened **4 fixed vaccination walk-in sites in Berlin, Plymouth, Claremont and Rochester** to deal with increasing demand for the COVID-19 vaccine and booster shots. Hours of operation are generally Monday - Friday 10 am - 7 pm and Saturday 9 am - 2 pm. More information about the sites, including holiday hours, can be found on the [On-Site Medical](#)

[Services website](#). The NH Executive Council will be asked to approve this coming Wednesday a contract to add an additional 6 walk-in fixed sites.

The next state-sponsored “Booster Blitz” is scheduled for Saturday, January 8. Registration and site information is anticipated shortly after the new year.

Section C is adapted from the NY Times:

C) Should I change my plans for holiday gatherings?

There isn’t a simple answer to this question. The best answer is to plan your event around the most vulnerable person in the room.”

Think about the things you would need to do to protect an older grandparent, for example, and that will give you an idea of whether the event should go forward with extra precautions, be scaled back or canceled.

You can lower your risk by asking that everyone get a booster, if eligible, and take a rapid test a few hours before the event. Focus on ventilation, and ask everyone to scale back their social activities before the event.

“If you’re celebrating Christmas Eve, get tested on Wednesday and then take a home rapid test on Christmas Eve, right before the party.

What if I feel sick?

Get tested. It’s the only way you’re going to know if what you’re feeling is a cold or Covid. It’s also important to know so that you can inform other people whom you might have exposed, should you test positive.

Now more than ever, it’s a good idea to keep a few rapid tests at home so you can test yourself. If you do test positive with an antigen test, it’s a good idea to follow up with a more sensitive PCR test. Try not to expose others: Use a drive-through testing site or walk to a mobile outdoor testing site. If neither of these are options, call your doctor’s office and ask them for guidance.

I tested positive. Now what?

The guidance is the same for Omicron as it is for other variants. If you’re vaccinated, the C.D.C. says you should isolate for 10 days and rest. If you live with other people, you should stay in a specific “sick room” or area, and use a separate bathroom, if available. Wear a mask and don’t share dishes.



Town of New Castle, NH
Settled 1623
Incorporated 1693

The 10-day isolation period begins the first full day after your symptoms develop. If you test positive, but don't have symptoms, the 10-day clock starts the day after you test positive. If you develop symptoms later, reset the clock. At any point if you have an emergency warning sign, like breathing trouble, go to the hospital.

D) For more details on vaccines:

New data from Moderna indicates the booster increased protective antibody levels by 37 fold. They also are developing an Omicron specific vaccine.

The Pfizer booster increased protective antibody levels 5 fold.

You can receive the flu shot and COVID vaccine at the same time. Pfizer or Moderna is preferred over J&J.

For boosters, you are eligible if you are at least 6 months out from the second Moderna or Pfizer vaccine.

If you had J&J (Johnson and Johnson), a booster is recommended 2 months after your first dose. This should be with Moderna or Pfizer.

You can mix and match vaccines for the booster. Meaning, if you had Pfizer as your first 2 dose series, you can have either Pfizer or Moderna for your booster and vice versa if you had Moderna first get the Pfizer.

If you had Johnson and Johnson first, a Moderna booster seems to provide the best protection.

E) Website for free COVID tests:

The state has contracted with Vault Health to supply PCR at-home saliva tests for 100,000 of residents that can requested at <https://learn.vaulthealth.com/nh/>.

F) FDA approved COVID tests – Here is a list of FDA approved COVID tests if you need to purchase one (Cut and paste web address into your browser.) These are the only ones you should buy currently:

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices/in-vitro-diagnostics-euas-antigen-diagnostic-tests-sars-cov-2>

G) Influenza is also a nasty beast and kills many people annually. Please, please get your flu shot if you have not done so already. This can be done through your physician's office or pharmacies.

I wish you a warm, peaceful, happy, and health holiday season.

Yours in Health,

Kathy Hollister, MD

Deputy Health Officer

Email: healthofficer@newcastlenh.org