

IMMUNIZATION COVID-19 UPDATE

ISSUE NO 43 | JANUARY 12, 2022



QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

How can I get an at-home COVID-19 test kit, and how much do they cost?

Beginning January 15, 2022, private insurance companies and group health plans will be required by the federal government to cover the cost of over-the-counter, at-home COVID-19 tests. This means that most consumers with private health coverage can go online or to a pharmacy/store to buy a test, and either get it paid for upfront by their health plan or get reimbursed for the cost by submitting a claim to their plan.

Individuals are eligible for up to eight over-the-counter COVID-19 diagnostic tests per month. That means a family of four, all on the same plan, would be able to get up to 32 tests covered by their health plan per month. However, whether online or in stores/pharmacies, supplies of tests have been limited and hard to find.

Medicaid is already currently covering the costs of over-the-counter, at-home COVID-19 tests.

Medicare pays for COVID-19 diagnostic tests performed by a laboratory. Individuals enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan should check to see if their plan is currently offering coverage/payment for at-home over-the-counter COVID-19 tests.

For more information on insurance companies covering the cost of at-home COVID-19 tests, go to [cms.gov](https://www.cms.gov).

COMPLETED
VACCINE SERIES
IN LOUISIANA

2,353,203*

*4,844,675 total doses
administered in Louisiana

LDH RECRUITING
YOUTH INTERESTED
IN YOUTH
AMBASSADOR
PROGRAM

LDH is currently recruiting interested youth for the Louisiana Youth Ambassador Program.
(Page 2)

CDC EXPANDS
COVID-19 BOOSTER
SHOT ELIGIBILITY

The CDC adjusted their recommendations for when people can receive a booster shot, shortening the interval from six months to five months.
(Page 2)

WEEKLY COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATE

LDH Recruiting Youth Interested in Youth Ambassador Program

Recruiting is underway for the Louisiana Youth Ambassador Program. The program has been receiving applications from regions across the state including Region 1 (Greater New Orleans area), Region 2 (Baton Rouge area), Region 5 (Southwest), Region 6 (Central), and Region 9 (Northshore). Although this is a good start, the goal is to have representation from all nine regions.

The program, sponsored by the Teen Vax Campaign and led by OPH's Immunization team, was launched in December to allow Louisiana students between the ages of 12 and 17 to help lead the effort to improve Louisiana's COVID-19 vaccination rates.

"The goal of the project is to have young people talking directly to their peers about the importance of getting the COVID-19 vaccination," said Jack McClure, Disease Outbreak Coordinator with OPH's Immunization Program.

For the Louisiana Youth Ambassador Program, applicants receive information at local meetings on how to create social media posts, graphics, talking points, and other content to help increase vaccination information and stop the spread of misinformation. Ambassadors will also plan events in their schools and communities to motivate their peers to get the vaccine and booster (if eligible).

Anyone who is interested, regardless of vaccination status, can join the campaign by applying as an individual, forming a new group or team, or by applying through an existing youth group (ex. sports team or club). Applications are accepted on a continuous basis.

For more information, go to layouthambassadors.org.

WHY JOIN?

BENEFITS TO JOINING INCLUDE:

- Statewide recognition as a Teen Ambassador.
- Leadership, Public Health and Advertising skills that can be beneficial in school, hobbies, or their future career.
- Incentives, including swag and other prizes.
- Eligible groups may also receive a mini-grant to support their work locally.

APPLY NOW!

BRING BACK LOUISIANA

Earlier last week, the CDC made the recommendation for recipients of a Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 primary series to shorten the interval from six months to five months.

Shortly after, the CDC recommended that the six-month interval between completing the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine series and receiving a booster dose also be shortened to five months.

The Louisiana Department of Health would like to announce that, effective immediately, individuals 12 and older who initially received an mRNA vaccines series – two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna – can now receive an mRNA booster shot five months after completing their series. *Please note that children and teens ages 12 to 17 must receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, as it is currently the only COVID-19 vaccine authorized for that age group.*

As a reminder, it was also recently recommended by the CDC that:

- Moderately or severely immunocompromised children ages 5 to 11 years should receive an additional primary dose of Pfizer-BioNTech to ensure optimal protection from the vaccine.
- Children and teens ages 12 to 17 years should receive a booster shot if eligible.

For more information on COVID-19 booster shots, go to cdc.gov.

CDC Says They Will Update Mask Guidance

The CDC says it plans to update its mask guidance to “best reflect the multiple options available to people and the different levels of protection they provide.”

The CDC did not say when its guidance will be updated. In the meantime, the CDC said in a statement, “any mask is better than no mask, and we encourage Americans to wear a well-fitting mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

Since the arrival of Omicron, health experts have urged Americans to upgrade their cloth masks to an N95 or KN95 because the new variant is so highly transmissible. But these higher-grade masks are costly and hard to find.

Prior to Omicron, CDC director Rochelle Walensky resisted suggesting N95 masks for the average American because the CDC didn't want to discourage people from wearing any mask.

Dawn O'Connell, a top official at the Health and Human Services Department, said Tuesday that the Biden administration plans to increase production of N95s. There are already 737 million N95 masks in the strategic national stockpile available for medical workers.

For more information on masks, visit cdc.gov.

COVID-19 Questions and Answers

IS COVID-19 CAUSED BY THE OMICRON VARIANT LESS SEVERE THAN INFECTION CAUSED BY OTHER VARIANTS?

Early data suggest that COVID-19 caused by the Omicron variant is less severe than infection caused by prior variants. Some studies have shown a reduced risk of hospitalization, intensive care unit admission, and in-hospital mortality. The relative mildness of disease reported in these studies may reflect the younger age of individuals impacted at this stage of the surge or a higher proportion of reinfections. While illness due to Omicron may be milder, the high volume of cases continues to lead to high hospitalization rates and may result in an excess burden on the health care system.

WHY IS THE CDC RECOMMENDING ONE OF THE MRNA COVID-19 VACCINES OVER JOHNSON & JOHNSON'S VACCINE?

In December 2021, the CDC stated a preference for one of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) over Johnson & Johnson's adenovirus COVID-19 vaccine. **The CDC made the decision because of growing evidence that Johnson & Johnson's vaccine increases the risk of blood clots.** Although very rare, this problem can be serious and even lead to death.

The blood clots in question involve blood vessels in the brain, lungs, abdomen, and legs, and are accompanied by low levels of blood platelets. This combination is referred to as thrombosis and thrombocytopenia syndrome, or TTS, an abbreviation of the medical terms for the two conditions.

Since the FDA granted emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in late February 2021, nearly 17 million doses of the one-dose vaccine have been given. A total of 54 cases of TTS, including nine deaths, were reported in people who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine through August 31, 2021. TTS has been seen in men and women across age ranges, but the highest risk was seen in women ages 30 to 49 years.

The Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine will still be available in the US to people who cannot or do not want to get an mRNA vaccine. The vaccine's label and fact sheet list symptoms of TTS, and urge anyone who experiences them after receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to seek immediate medical attention.

While the risk of experiencing a blood clot after vaccination is very low, anyone who experiences the following symptoms after receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should seek immediate medical care: severe or persistent headache, chest pain, blurred vision, severe pain in your abdomen, leg swelling, shortness of breath, tiny red spots under the skin, and new or easy bruising.



SERIES COMPLETED BY RACE:

- **White:** 58.43%
- **Black:** 31.24%
- **American Indian:** 0.41%
- **Asian:** 2.82%
- **Native Hawaiian:** 0.19%
- **Unknown:** 1.19%
- **Other:** 5.72%

SERIES COMPLETED BY AGE:

- **5-17:** 6.54%
- **18-29:** 13.17%
- **30-39:** 13.45%
- **40-49:** 13.82%
- **50-59:** 16.42%
- **60-69:** 18.31%
- **70+:** 18.3%

SERIES COMPLETED BY GENDER:

- **Female:** 54.1%
- **Male:** 45.65%
- **Unknown:** 0.25%

All breakdowns shown here are for Louisiana residents only. Race data completeness is expected to improve as we continue our outreach with vaccine providers.

Good Reads

New Orleans reinstates indoor mask mandate ahead of carnival – This article talks about how New Orleans officials will once again require masks indoors.

Read more at [nola.com](https://www.nola.com).

Louisiana COVID hospitalizations have increased more than 8-fold in one month – This article talks about how the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Louisiana has risen by 55% over the last week and eight times the amount hospitalized one month ago.

Read more at [nola.com](https://www.nola.com).

Baton Rouge teacher union demands schools go virtual because of COVID, calls for shutdown – This article talks about how a teacher union in Baton Rouge is trying to shut down public schools after the local school district fails to agree to demand to shift immediately to virtual learning.

Read more at theadvocate.com.