

IMMUNIZATION COVID-19 UPDATE

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QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK:

How can I protect myself from the new Omicron variant?

The same way you guard against COVID-19 caused by any other variant: Get vaccinated if you haven't yet, get a booster if you're eligible, and step up other precautions you may have relaxed, like wearing a mask and avoiding crowds.

For all the attention Omicron is getting, the overwhelming cause of infections and deaths in many places remains the extra-contagious Delta variant.

For more information on COVID-19 variants, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

Is travel safe during the pandemic this holiday season?

It depends. It can be safe if you're fully vaccinated against COVID-19, but officials say people who haven't gotten the shots should delay travel. Regardless of vaccination status, all travelers should keep taking precautions like avoiding indoor, unmasked crowds.

If you plan on traveling internationally, you will need to get a COVID-19 viral test (regardless of vaccination status or citizenship) no more than one day before you travel by air into the U.S. You must show your negative result to the airline before you board your flight.

The CDC says not to travel if you're sick, or if you tested positive for COVID-19 and your isolation period isn't over yet — even if you're fully vaccinated. Unvaccinated people who decide to travel should get a COVID-19 test one to three days before travel and three to five days after returning.

For more information on COVID-19 travel recommendations by destination, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

COMPLETED
VACCINE SERIES
IN LOUISIANA

2,281,514*

*4,704,144 total doses
administered in Louisiana

LDH ADDRESSES
COVID-19
MISINFORMATION

LDH leaders pushed back against COVID-19 misinformation in the Louisiana House Committee on Health and Welfare.

(Page 2)

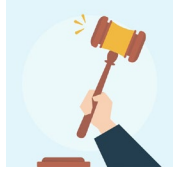
LDH IDENTIFIES
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(Page 2)

WEEKLY COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATE

Louisiana Department of Health Addresses COVID-19 Misinformation



LDH leaders pushed back against COVID-19 misinformation in the Louisiana House Committee on Health and Welfare.

LDH continues to move through the process of adding the COVID-19 vaccine to the School Immunization Schedule. This proposed rule is being promulgated through the normal, deliberate, and transparent rule-making process. Yesterday's legislative hearing was the next step in that process – and LDH welcomed the members' questions and the opportunity to clarify misinformation.

“The intentional spread of health disinformation is especially dangerous during a pandemic because it confuses and can mislead families who have legitimate questions,” said State Health Officer Dr. Joseph Kanter. “The Louisiana Department of Health is committed and will continue to share the facts but we alone can't win the fight against dis- and misinformation. To do so will take all of us – and it starts with us demanding better. Many of us spread misinformation unintentionally; we are trying to inform others who don't realize the information is false. If you're not sure, don't share.”

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy has warned that health misinformation poses a grave threat to our nation and is costing the U.S. lives during the pandemic.

A few key facts:

- LDH is proposing for the COVID-19 vaccine to be added to the School Immunization Schedule **only for ages that have received full licensure and approval from the FDA**, which is currently for ages 16 and older. Full licensure and approval from the FDA signify the very highest endorsement of safety and efficacy from the U.S. government.
- **Louisiana law allows parents to easily exempt their child from a vaccine** on the School Immunization Schedule by simply claiming a medical, religious, or personal/philosophical exemption. If COVID-19 is added to the schedule parents will be easily able to exempt their children from this vaccine as well.
- **No one is immune to COVID-19 and its severe outcomes, including children.** Over 25% of COVID-19 infections in Louisiana have been children, resulting in 18 deaths and over 275 cases of Multi-system Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C).

For more information on the Louisiana House Committee on Health and Welfare or to view Dr. Kanter's statement to the House Committee, go to ldh.la.gov.

Louisiana Department of Health Identifies 3 More Probable Cases of Omicron in the State

The Louisiana Department of Health announced Wednesday, December 7, that three more probable cases of the Omicron variant have been reported in Louisiana.

One of the cases involves an individual in Region 4, which is the Acadiana area, who traveled internationally. This individual did not require hospitalization.

Health officials said the other two cases involve individuals in Region 1, the Greater New Orleans area. LDH says they do not have additional information on these two cases at this time.

This brings the total number of Omicron cases in Louisiana to four: three probable cases and one confirmed.

The first Omicron case in Louisiana was identified on December 3.

“These new cases of Omicron should serve as a reminder of the ongoing threat of COVID especially as we get ready to gather for the holidays,” State Health Officer Dr. Joseph Kanter said in a statement. “The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones is get vaccinated and get the booster.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and LDH recommend everyone 5 years of age and older get vaccinated and that everyone 18 years of age and older get a booster if eligible. The CDC also recommends wearing a mask in certain settings.

On November 26, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the Omicron variant as a “variant of concern.” This new variant was first reported to the WHO by government officials in South Africa. Since that time, it has been detected in 57 countries and more than 19 U.S. states.

Information is still emerging, but Omicron includes multiple mutations across the SARS-CoV-2 genome.

LDH said there is concern this new variant may be more transmissible than previous strains and that Omicron may carry an increased risk of reinfection compared to other variants of concern.

LDH has established a network of laboratories to conduct genomic sequencing on positive SARS-CoV-2 specimens in order to track circulating SARS-CoV-2 lineages, including newly emerging variants such as Omicron. Epidemiologists, laboratorians, and researchers will continue to closely monitor these data in order to continue to identify Omicron cases in Louisiana.

For the latest news from LDH on the Omicron variant, go to covidvaccine.la.gov.

New Study Shows Three Doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Offers Protection Against Omicron

Preliminary lab studies show two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine may not provide sufficient protection against the Omicron variant, but three doses are able to neutralize it.

Samples from people who had two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine saw, on average, a more than 25-times reduction in neutralization ability against the Omicron variant than the earlier virus, indicating that two doses of BNT162b2 may not be sufficient to protect against infection with the Omicron variant.

Pfizer and BioNTech said two doses may still provide protection against severe disease.

"Although two doses of the vaccine may still offer protection against severe disease caused by the Omicron strain, it's clear from these preliminary data that protection is improved with a third dose of our vaccine," Pfizer Chairman and CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement. "Ensuring as many people as possible are fully vaccinated with the first two-dose series and a booster remains the best course of action to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

The initial lab studies used serum from blood of individuals who received two or three doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. The serum was collected from subjects three weeks after their second dose, or one month after a third dose.

Pfizer and BioNTech are continuing to develop a variant-specific vaccine for Omicron and say it will be available by March if it's needed.

For more information on the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Omicron variant, visit [pfizer.com](https://www.pfizer.com).



SERIES COMPLETED BY RACE:

- **White:** 58.5%
- **Black:** 30.78%
- **American Indian:** 0.4%
- **Asian:** 2.79%
- **Native Hawaiian:** 0.19%
- **Unknown:** 1.29%
- **Other:** 6.07%

SERIES COMPLETED BY AGE:

- **5-17:** 5.5%
- **18-29:** 12.98%
- **30-39:** 13.4%
- **40-49:** 13.89%
- **50-59:** 16.7%
- **60-69:** 18.63%
- **70+:** 18.6%

SERIES COMPLETED BY GENDER:

- **Female:** 54.15%
- **Male:** 45.59%
- **Unknown:** 0.26%

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

Biden administration appeals blocking of COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers – This article talks about how a Louisiana federal judge's ruling blocking the Biden administration's nationwide COVID-19 vaccine mandate for healthcare workers has been appealed.

Read more at theadvertiser.com.

What does the end of the COVID-19 pandemic look like? Louisiana's health officer answers – This article talks about how Dr. Joseph Kanter thinks getting vaccinated can help transition this pandemic to an endemic.

Read more at wdsu.com.

Louisiana Supreme Court hears arguments on Ochsner's COVID-19 vaccine mandate – This article talks about how the Supreme Court of Louisiana is set to rule on COVID-19 vaccine mandates imposed on Ochsner Health employees.

Read more at theadvertiser.com.