

## Statement on Omicron variant and holiday recommendations

### Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm issued this statement today regarding the increase in spread of the Omicron variant in Minnesota and recommendations for upcoming holiday gatherings

Minnesota is preparing for an increase in COVID-19 cases in the coming weeks driven by the Omicron variant. As reported by CDC earlier this week, the Omicron variant is the dominant strain in the U.S., and based on laboratory data, we estimate it is now the dominant strain in Minnesota. This aligns with evidence we've seen that Omicron spreads much easier than earlier variants. The quick rise of the Omicron variant underscores the importance of everyone taking steps to slow its spread so we don't overwhelm our already stressed health care system. We have nearly 3.5 million Minnesotans fully vaccinated and protected, and more Minnesotans are getting vaccinated and boosted every day. We have the tools and knowledge to respond more effectively than at any other point in the pandemic, and the federal government will be providing additional resources for testing and health care support in the weeks ahead. As Minnesotans prepare for holiday gatherings, regardless of vaccination status, it is essential that we all use multiple layers of protection to avoid the worst impacts of Omicron to protect our family, friends, and neighbors. These layers of protection include:

- **Get Vaccinated.** Minnesotans age 5 and up can be vaccinated. Vaccines are the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones — especially those who can't be vaccinated and children under 5.
- **Get Boosted.** All Minnesotans 16 and older should get a booster when they are due (six months after receiving Pfizer and Moderna, and two months after receiving Johnson & Johnson). Researchers believe the Omicron variant is more transmissible than previous variants, but getting fully vaccinated and boosted significantly increases protection against severe illness or death from infection.
- **Get Tested.** Even if you're not experiencing any symptoms, test before gatherings to make sure you're not spreading the virus to others unknowingly. Take advantage of one of the many free testing options the state has to offer, or make an appointment with a local clinic or pharmacy. If you are using an over the counter at-home rapid test, use it as close to your gathering as possible. If you test positive, no matter what kind of test, stay home. If you test negative, you should get tested again if you develop symptoms.
- **Stay Safe.** Wear a well-fitting mask while traveling and in indoor public settings like a grocery store, a shopping mall, or a school. Wash your hands and do your best to avoid crowded indoor spaces before getting together with family and friends — especially high-risk loved ones and children under 5 who can't be vaccinated. Know the vaccination status of those with whom you are gathering to make sure everyone is safer when together.

The bottom line is that if you are vaccinated and boosted, get tested before you go, and mask indoors when you're in public, you can enjoy a safer holiday with your family and friends