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UC Davis Genome Center Identifies Significant Increase in Omicron Variant in Yolo County

DAVIS, Calif. (Dec. 22, 2021) —The UC Davis Genome Center detected and confirmed this week 42 cases of the B.1.1.529 (Omicron) variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 in Davis, El Macero, West Sacramento and Woodland. The Omicron variant had previously been detected in West Sacramento, but this marks the first known cases of Omicron in the Davis, El Macero and Woodland communities. The Omicron variant has also been detected in trace amounts in the City of Davis' sewage through Healthy Davis Together's wastewater monitoring initiative.

The UC Davis Genome Center screens every positive COVID-19 test conducted by Healthy Davis Together for all currently known SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern so that action can be taken to alert and protect the community. The individuals who had a positive PCR test result for the Omicron variant were tested between December 12–18, 2021. Several of the Davis cases are associated with a single workplace holiday party. The party, with approximately 50 attendees, and subsequent workplace spread are associated with an outbreak of at least 16 cases, of which 10 are known so far to be Omicron. Of the 16 cases, all were fully vaccinated and eight had received their booster. Currently all known Omicron cases are in isolation or have completed isolation.

"The Omicron variant is spreading quickly in Yolo County, and accounted for 41% of new cases detected by the UC Davis Genome Center last week," said Dr. Aimee Sisson, Yolo County Public Health Officer. "The spread of Omicron is coming at a time when many people are travelling and gathering for the holidays. Everyone, including fully vaccinated persons, should take additional precautions right now. Wear a mask that fits and filters well when you are indoors, improve indoor ventilation with portable air filters, and ask everyone attending a gathering to test right before the event. In addition, anyone who isn't vaccinated or boosted should get vaccinated as soon as possible in order to protect themselves against severe COVID-19 illness."

The detection of the Omicron variant through clinical testing comes as genetic markers of the variant have been identified in the city's wastewater by Healthy Davis Together and its partner the Sewer Coronavirus Alert Network (SCAN). Davis is one of eight sewage treatment plants that SCAN monitors by testing daily samples of solids in wastewater, which carry signs of the virus and its variants if present in a community. Wastewater monitoring is another tool that can be used as an early detection system for new strains and future spikes of COVID-19.



“The information collected through Davis’ wastewater monitoring program can be useful in our long-term community effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19,” said Brad Pollock, Director of Healthy Davis Together, and Chair of the UC Davis Department of Public Health Sciences.

The Omicron variant has been previously identified as a [variant of concern](#) by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The CDC is working with other U.S. and global public health and industry partners to learn more about this variant, including how severe its cases are compared to other variants and the amount of protection provided by existing vaccines. Until more is known, it is important to take every precaution to prevent the spread of the new variant.

Here are the most important things people can do right now to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including the Omicron variant:

- Get vaccinated. With the recent approval of the Pfizer vaccine for children from 5-11 years of age, HDT strongly encourages everyone 5 years and older to get vaccinated.
- If you’re already vaccinated, get boosted 2 months after a J&J vaccine and 6 months after the 2nd Moderna or Pfizer vaccine.
- Get tested if you have symptoms or have been exposed to someone infected with COVID-19.
- If you are planning to travel or gather, it’s recommended that you get tested one to three days prior to and three to five days after traveling or gathering, even if you’re vaccinated. If you aren’t vaccinated yet, it’s important to get tested regularly.
- Follow local mask guidance. N95s, KN95s, and KF94s provide additional protection and are a good option for those more vulnerable to severe disease, for example, older adults and people with underlying conditions.

For current testing locations and hours in Davis, Woodland and throughout Yolo County, visit HealthyDavisTogether.org/testing/. Appointments are preferred, but walk-ins are accepted at most testing locations. Parking is free.

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About Healthy Davis Together

Healthy Davis Together is a joint project between UC Davis and the City of Davis to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community and facilitate a coordinated and gradual return to regular city activities and student life. Comments and questions are welcome at info@HealthyDavisTogether.org.