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In the Loop

What You Should Know About Omicron, the New Coronavirus Variant

A new variant of coronavirus initially detected in South Africa is prompting renewed concern regarding the pandemic. In November 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) named the new variant “Omicron,” and labeled it a “variant of concern,” the agency’s most serious category for tracking. Such a designation is reserved for dangerous variants that may be more transmissible or virulent or could decrease the effectiveness of vaccines or treatments.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that Omicron has already been detected in over a dozen U.S. states. Additionally, Omicron has been detected in at least 50 countries so far, including Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany and South Africa. Numerous countries, including the United States, have already

restricted travel while waiting for health experts to learn more about the potentially dangerous variant.

“This is the most concerning variant we’ve seen since Delta. It’s going to take a really high bar for something to take over for Delta, and we don’t know whether this is going to do it.”

- Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute

Epidemiologists are racing to learn more about Omicron as, at this moment, there is too little research available to draw conclusions or provide recommendations. In the meantime, health experts urge Americans to continue taking proper precautions.

What's Next?

Experts still don't know a lot about the emerging Omicron variant at this point. Scientists are racing to determine its severity and transmissibility, along with how available COVID-19 vaccines protect against the new variant.

Health experts and the CDC continue to encourage COVID-19 vaccination (including booster shots) to best protect yourself and others from current and emerging variants of the coronavirus. Additionally, masking and social distancing can help stop the spread of COVID-19.



Creating a Psychologically Safe Work Environment

Being psychologically safe means you feel secure taking risks and being vulnerable in front of others. In a work environment that fosters this security, you believe you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

Having a workplace environment in which you feel comfortable taking risks is crucial because it:

- Enhances workplace engagement
- Improves well-being
- Inspires creativity and ideas

- Fosters an inclusive culture

Creating a psychologically safe work environment is intentional, and it can positively impact you and the overall work culture. While psychological safety typically hinges on organizational leadership, there are still ways every employee can challenge or influence workplace cultural norms, including:

- Being curious
- Listening actively
- Communicating effectively
- Having an open mind
- Fostering a safe environment
- Practicing awareness
- Supporting others

Psychological safety is a key work dynamic that takes time to build but just moments to destroy. Talk to your manager if you have concerns or questions about psychological safety in your work environment.