

As of this morning, King County's case counts have increased 17-fold since the beginning of December. We are reporting nearly 19,000 positive cases since Friday. And reporting of positive over-the-counter antigen tests remains undercounted as individuals need to self-report via phone to DOH, who have been overwhelmed with the increased case load in the recent week. DOH and PHSKC are exploring avenues to increase reporting capacity for positive test results.

The new peak for cases was 7,552 new cases with a specimen collection date of 1/4/22. This is more than 6 times higher than our previous high point of 1,207 cases in November 2020.

Given the magnitude of this surge, response activities are having to prioritize their services.

UW is estimating that Omicron is currently responsible for 90% of local COVID-19 -- in just about a month since it was first detected. Some are predicting that Omicron will peak locally in mid-January. But we don't know if that will happen nor if we will see a rapid decrease in cases or just a plateau.

Hospitalizations:

- At this time, we have seen an increase in hospitalization as well – in the most recent week, there has been a 110% increase in hospitalizations compared to the previous week. Since 12/13/21, the 7-day average number of daily hospitalizations has increased nearly 7-fold (from 7 to 52), and the number of hospitalizations on 1/4/22 was 72 - the highest number of hospitalizations in a single day since the start of the pandemic.
- While Omicron may be more mild, “a little” of “a lot” of cases will result in increasing hospitalization rates. And our hospitals are suffering acute staff shortage due to many staff people being out due to COVID.
- We continue to work with the hospital system and the State to determine how King County can assist to help alleviate the strain on hospital capacity.

Vaccines are still working:

- People who are unvaccinated continue to be at the highest risk for CoV-19 infection, hospitalization, and death, although we are seeing an increasing number of less severe infections among vaccinated people.
- In the 30 days through 12/22, people who were not fully-vaccinated were 2.5X more likely to develop CoV-19, 13X more likely to be hospitalized, and 27X more likely to die from CoV-19.

Testing kits:

- The County purchased 700,090 rapid tests directly from manufacturers, and the first 100,000 will be distributed this week.
- These test kits were purchased with FEMA dollars and have strict requirements for where/who they are distributed to.
- We'll distribute these test kits to initially to LTCF, EMS, healthcare facilities with urgent short-term needs, correctional facilities, and other high-risk congregate

settings, followed by community organizations in areas of greatest need including shelters, and senior centers.

- We are also partnering with Sound Cities Association and the City of Seattle to be sure their, and our own, critical infrastructure staff have access to testing kits if needed. We have a scarcity of tests so they are prioritized for public facing employees.
- Community health centers and community testing sites will also receive tests. These organizations have been contacted and are expecting the kits.

Masks:

- With the omicron variant, it is important that people begin upgrading their cloth masks to surgical or KN/N95s.
- The County has been working to distribute masks to community groups, cities, and food banks.
- More than 1.6 million surgical masks and over 200,000 N95s were distributed to approximately 200 community groups, cities, and food banks in December.
- This month, we plan to distribute approximately 135,000 KN90 masks to more than 100 community based organizations.

County Operations:

- We continue to see staffing shortages within our own operations as a result of Covid impacts. We are following CDC and Public Health guidance and meeting daily to discuss any potential impacts to our core county services – including Public Health, DCHS I&Q, Detention, Metro, and Roads.