

August 8, 2024

Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19

SUMMARY

COVID-19 cases have risen across the District, but hospitalizations for severe cases remain low. Current evidence suggests the dominant variants (KP.2 and KP.3) appear with milder symptoms and onset around 2-14 days from exposure. The generally observed symptoms of COVID-19 remain fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. Vaccination for COVID-19 is encouraged for everyone age 6 months and older, including boosters. Staying up-to-date on these and other vaccines can prevent disease and help reduce severity. Wearing a mask and distancing yourself from others when you feel ill can help lower the risk of transmission of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. Please get tested if you are experiencing any of the symptoms of COVID-19.

VACCINATIONS

Are the vaccines still effective for the new variants? Yes, the updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine formula can prevent COVID-19 disease and help reduce the severity, if you get sick. Vaccination is recommended for anyone age 6 months and older. Please visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/en/> for more information and to locate a vaccine site near you.

DATA TRENDS

What is the existing data on COVID-19 in the District? COVID-19 levels in the District are comparable to this time last summer, with a case rate of approximately 10 confirmed positive cases per 100,000 standard population. Our level of hospitalizations due to COVID-19 mirrors the level observed during this time last year. The percentage of staffed beds occupied by patients with COVID-19 in the District of Columbia was approximately 1.4%. This underscores the milder infections observed with the current variants compared with previous dominant strains. Notably, there have been no deaths from COVID-19 reported in the District since March 17, 2024. This is a good indicator that vaccines work to prevent disease and help reduce the severity.

Wastewater surveillance continues to be a valuable tool in understanding COVID-19 levels. While a slight increase in COVID-19 has been observed via wastewater, this too appears to follow the

seasonal trend observed last summer. Current data from wastewater surveillance can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/nwss/rv/COVID19-currentlevels.html>

Why are cases up? Increased summer travel and activities have historically created increases in the summer. Current dominant variants (KP.2 and KP.3) appear with milder symptoms. These variants are part of the Omicron sub-lineage and evolved from JN.1 that was dominant in December 2023. As such, the symptoms are similar to the JN.1 variant, with onset around 2-14 days from exposure. These symptoms may vary by person, but usually present as¹

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

How do these variants compare to previous ones? Current dominant variants (KP.2 and KP.3) are appearing with milder symptoms than previous variants like Delta and Omicron. While a part of the Omicron sub-lineage, the current dominant variants evolved from JN.1 which was dominant in December 2023. Milder symptoms mean that most people will not experience more severe outcomes, like hospitalization, from these variants. We estimate the severity of infection by the number of hospital beds occupied by patients with COVID-19. In summary, there is limited evidence that suggests the current variants are more transmissible and no evidence to suggest they cause more severe disease.²

TESTING

Are the current self-tests still accurate for the new variants? Yes, the current self-tests are still accurate for the new variants. When using a self-test, it is important you follow the FDA and manufacturer's recommendations. These are commonly found on the test's packaging.

Where can I find a self-test? The free testing program through DC Health was discontinued in March 2023. Self-testing kits are available for purchase at drug stores, grocery stores, and other locations throughout the city. For no-cost testing options, visit <https://testinglocator.cdc.gov>

RESPONSE

What can people do to protect themselves?

- The COVID-19 vaccination is encouraged for everyone age 6 months and older, including boosters. Staying up to date on these and other vaccines can prevent disease and help reduce severity.
- Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of most common infections, including COVID-19.
- Wearing a mask and distancing yourself from others when you feel ill can help lower the risk of transmission of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.

What should I do if I'm feeling sick? If you are experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness, including COVID-19, you should stay home and away from others until you have been fever-free and feeling better for at least 24 hours without medication.

Once both of these are true, you can resume normal activities with added precautions for the next 5 days. These include masks, physical distancing, and steps for increased ventilation when around other people³

Is there a treatment? Yes, the FDA has approved several medications to treat COVID-19. These treatments must be prescribed by a health care provider and began within 5-7 days of symptom onset.

Is the health department doing anything to respond to the surge? DC Health continues to closely monitor COVID-19 in the District. At present, the case rates we are observing align with the levels seen during the summer season last year.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, and data trends, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/covid/index.html>

REFERENCES

- CDC. (2024, July 15). *Symptoms of COVID-19*. COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/covid/signs-symptoms/index.html>
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- CDC. (2024, March 1). *About Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick | Respiratory Illnesses* | CDC. [www.cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html). <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html>

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