

COVID Chronicles:- CONTINUE COVID Vigilance

We have been humbled by this virus before and no one can predict confidently what will happen in the future.' Nick Loman Professor of Microbial Genomics, Birmingham University (UK)

Nationwide, COVID-19 hospitalization and fatalities have decreased. But as the more contagious omicron subvariant BA.2 continues its spread; cases are ticking upward in nine states as of March 24. The latest variant proportion estimates from [the CDC](#) show the omicron subvariant BA.2 accounts for more than one-third of COVID-19 cases nationwide and more than half of cases in the Northeast. *Rhode Island had the highest proportion of BA.2 cases of all states, according to the NYTimes.* Researchers have detected a rise in viral particles recovered from nearly 150 wastewater-surveillance sites. And we are still traveling internationally from places where the BA.2 infection rates are very high.

If cases rise again, as many experts expect, we must prepare to lower the chance that we will pass the virus to someone, and their family, for whom the consequence can be catastrophic. COVID has killed one out of every 75 older Americans; residences of long-term care facilities make up only 3 % of the population but account for 1 in 5 COVID deaths.

According to Dr Michael Fine, former director of RI Department of Health, 'In Rhode Island, at least 2300 are walking around with Covid-19 according to colleagues who are good at these numbers. But I think that's an underestimate, and the real number is closer to 5000.'

Essential and front –line workers have fairly high density contact in restricted areas with a significant proportion of the general population. Even without any surge extra precautions work to limit transmission.

- *Personally anxious, wear a mask, Dr. Tom Frieden, a former CDC director, advises. A high-quality mask [will protect the wearer](#) especially in indoor settings even if others nearby are maskless.*
- *Try to hold gatherings or meeting outdoors, especially as the weather gets better. And try to ensure that if indoors the space is well ventilated.*

What to do if a surge comes.

Compliance with the full régime of vaccines is a necessary step

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are highly effective in preventing the most severe forms of COVID-19. All persons eligible for vaccination should get vaccinated and stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccination.

The CDC updates its Covid Community Levels map every Thursday, showing areas where Covid is at a “high” (orange), “medium” (yellow) or “low” (green) risk. High-risk congregate settings may implement added prevention as needed in the event of a facility outbreak even if COVID-19 Community Levels in the surrounding community are low.

RI is designated by CDC as ‘low’ currently [April4]. Other sections of the country are not as lucky. Fourteen counties in the US are ranked as ‘high’ by the CDC. Three counties in Central New York counties are seeing a more disturbing trend-- an uptake in hospitalizations. That could be us soon.

If the CDC map shifts to yellow or orange, it’s time for extra layered precautions such as: -

- Renewed stress to get fully vaccinated
- Donning high quality masks in public indoor spaces,
- Revamping up ventilation
- Turning indoor meetings/gatherings to virtual or at least hybrid; request on site arrivals to take a quick antigen test at least 8hrs before. Mask during the meeting. Also acquire and utilize HEPA air portable machines in indoor spaces.

Another additional indicator is the community’s positive test rate. Experts advise taking more precautions as you see positivity rates start to rise to 5 percent. There have been weeks where RI was pegged at 4.1% and even higher based on capturing only about 60% of all 'true' cases. If hospitalization rates begin to increase and more hospital beds are devoted to COVID patients that would begin to trigger implementation of stricter precautions. [4/7/22]

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