



## San Francisco Department of Public Health

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **\*\*\*STATEMENT\*\*\***

### **BAY AREA HEALTH OFFICERS URGE BOOSTERS TO PROTECT AGAINST OMICRON VARIANT**

Public health agencies across the Bay Area urge everyone eligible to get vaccinated and, if eligible, get a COVID-19 booster dose right away to protect against the rapidly spreading Omicron variant.

Widely available by appointment or at drop-in sites, boosters maintain the power of vaccines to strongly protect against infection, severe illness, and death from COVID-19. Everyone should get one when eligible, but particularly those over 50 or those with significant underlying health conditions.

Public health officials in Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Marin, Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, and Sonoma counties as well as the City of Berkeley encourage anyone eligible who needs a booster dose to get one as soon as possible.

Get a booster if you are 16 years or older and have received a second Pfizer dose at least six months ago, or if you are 18 or older and received a second Moderna dose six months ago. Anyone who has received a single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine at least two months ago should also get a booster.

To find a vaccination site for a booster in San Francisco, please go to [sf.gov/getvaccinated](https://sf.gov/getvaccinated). Many sites require an appointment, but there are drop in options available at SFDPH-affiliated sites and at other health systems sites.

As of December 13, just 44% of eligible San Francisco residents have received a booster, and approximately 68% residents who are 65 and have received one.

San Francisco had the first detected case of Omicron in the United States on December 1, and it is likely that the variant is now spreading rapidly through the community. Recent preliminary results from positive COVID tests show there are at least 30 probable cases of the Omicron variant among San Francisco residents, though this is likely an undercount.

Many more cases of Omicron are expected to be reported in the coming days and weeks and based on the exponential growth in cases being seen in Europe, there is a significant risk of exponential growth in COVID-19 cases in our region in the coming weeks. The United Kingdom currently has more COVID-19 cases than at any time during the 2-year pandemic. Other highly vaccinated countries that mirror the



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Bay Area's high vaccination rates, such as Denmark and Norway, are predicting Omicron will become the dominant variant in a matter of days.

Evidence suggests that Omicron spreads more rapidly than other variants, and more is being learned every day. Although some evidence suggests that a lower percentage of people infected with Omicron may be hospitalized and die, if a surge causes many thousands of new cases per day, even a small percentage of that total entering our hospitals could still overwhelm our hospitals.

“Although we have made great progress in our booster uptake in the last several weeks, in the face of Omicron it is vital that all individuals who are eligible make a plan to get vaccinated as soon as possible, especially those at higher risk of becoming severely ill,” said Dr. Susan Philip, Health Officer for San Francisco County. “We commend San Franciscans who have already gotten vaccinated and have received their booster to protect themselves, their family, and community.”

Although vaccinations including boosters are the most important prevention tools we have against Omicron, other measures like masking, testing, ventilation, and distancing provide additional layers of defense against COVID-19. As the holiday season is upon us, people should stay mindful of risks and take steps to decrease them.

If people travel or gather for the holidays, the San Francisco Department of Public Health recommends the following:

- Have everyone ages 5+ get their COVID-19 vaccine and booster if eligible.
- Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate themselves and get tested as soon as possible.
- Get tested before travel, upon return, and again 3-5 days later.
- Take advantage of quick and easy home test kits available in pharmacies and stores.
- Outside gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings.
- Take all precautions, including vaccinations, boosters and testing, when gathering with others without masks – especially with elderly or immunocompromised individuals, and anyone who is unvaccinated or not yet boosted.
- Wear a mask indoors and in crowded settings.
- Unvaccinated adults should avoid travel and gatherings outside their household.

Parents of very young children and those who have not been vaccinated should make sure to take all advised precautions. Avoid large gatherings of unmasked people. Always wear a mask in indoor public settings (unless under age 2).

Vaccinations are no-cost to the public, insurance is not required, and there are no immigration requirements. Updated data on boosters in San Francisco can be found [here](#).

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