

Statement from Allina Health on Omicron COVID-19 variant in Minnesota

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Throughout the course of this pandemic, scientific experts have continuously warned that COVID-19 variants will continue to emerge until we are able to suppress the ability of the virus to circulate and mutate through widespread vaccination efforts. We live within a connected global community and today omicron—the latest known variant—was confirmed to be present in Minnesota.

While the scientific community works rapidly to answer key questions about the Omicron variant including its transmissibility, severity, and the level of protection from our current vaccines, there is a lot about the current state of COVID-19 in Minnesota that we do know and can act on now to control the spread in our community.

First and foremost, like other health systems in Minnesota and around the country, Allina Health is being strained beyond its limits on a daily basis trying to meet the existing health care needs of the community. We are in the thick of an extended fourth COVID surge that is being compounded by staffing shortages and high volumes of non-COVID medical needs exacerbated by delayed care and seasonal illnesses like influenza. Our remarkable care teams have been in the trenches of this pandemic for almost two years continuously demonstrating their commitment, ingenuity and resilience in delivering compassionate care in exceedingly difficult circumstances. However, our care teams cannot carry the burden of this pandemic on their broad and capable, yet weary shoulders alone. We need a similar level of commitment and partnership from the community to ensure timely access to care for everyone who needs it.

In the wake of delta and in the face of omicron, here is what we can all do to take control of our health crisis:

- *Get vaccinated and boosted. This is our single greatest tool in the fight against COVID and can reduce pressure on the health care system.*
- *Recommit to following public health practices like testing, masking, social distancing, washing hands and staying home when sick. This is especially important during the holiday season and at this time of increased seasonal illness.*
- *Seek preventative care, like screenings, to maintain health and avoid more advanced illness in the future.*
- *Finally, remember to show grace and gratitude for all those who continue to show up daily to provide care to our friends and family. They need your support and encouragement now more than ever.*

The arrival of omicron is certainly not the news we need right now or wished for. However, we will control its impact on our community if we all take the steps outlined above. We are at a critical point in the pandemic journey and our caregivers need help. The real front line has always been in the community and the decisions we make every day about our actions in the midst of this pandemic. Minnesota has a history of rising to challenges and we know that by working together we can do so again to protect the health and safety of our communities.