

A COVID-19 UPDATE FROM LISA ALLGOOD, *Executive Presbyter of Cincinnati Presbytery and Immunocytochemist*

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...yes, it's me again. You thought we were through, didn't you?

No need to panic or change anything just yet, but I wanted to keep you aware.

After weeks in free fall, with new Covid-19 cases are starting to level off in the US, the Omicron BA.2 subvariant is here. It's been climbing steadily in Europe and is now the predominant variant (85%) in circulation, increasing by 20% week on week. Since Europe reduced testing, mask requirements, and distancing a few weeks before we did, you can be sure BA.2 will start to peak in the US in a few weeks. In fact, it is already 50% of cases in the northeast and northwest, and also climbing by about 20% over the past few weeks.

However, the UK is more highly vaccinated than the US. Among those ages 12 and older, 86% of the UK population has had two doses of a vaccine, while more than two-thirds have gotten a third or booster dose. In the US, 74% individuals ages 12 and older have had two doses of a vaccine, but just 46% have had a booster. Omicron was such a widespread infection event that many people have some natural immunity (although it's not clear how protective that immunity is given the that although I call it "Son of Omicron", it has 40 distinct mutations that makes it quite different.)

Omicron BA.2 is 30% more infectious (rapid spread) than the original Omicron BA.1 (as infectious (or more) than measles, the most infectious virus known to man). The R is about 12, which means 1 person on average affects 12 others.

Like Omicron BA.1, symptoms (especially in the vaccinated) are milder and tend to be upper respiratory – which unfortunately makes it easy to mistake for seasonal spring allergies. Serious infections and the high death rate – highest ever seen was January of this year – occur predominantly in the unvaccinated. Although vaccination antibody protection does wane with time, vaccinated individuals still appear to be covered by 70-80%.

Currently in the US, new Covid-19 cases are holding steady or increasing in about 19 states, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. I'm not expecting the rapid spike we've seen before but – we're not done yet. And with only 15% of the developing world vaccinated, new variants will emerge. Delta came from India and Omicron BA.1 from South Africa. This CDC graph tells a story to pay attention to.

Be blessed and stay safe. We need you all. lisa

