

## A COVID-19 UPDATE FROM LISA ALLGOOD

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The current Omicron variant in circulation, BA.5, is adept at evading the current vaccine, even with boosters. It has enough variations to have successfully created a series of new waves across Europe as well as now beginning in the United States. While the original vaccine and boosters continue to protect against serious illness with Omicron BA.5, re-infections and new infections with this variant are increasing steadily. COVID Omicron BA.5 is evolving to evade protection from infection offered by both vaccination or recovery from previous illness with COVID, and it is more transmissible as well, although it generally causes milder symptoms than the original COVID except in those at high risk and with underlying medical conditions or immune insufficiency.

With restrictions and caution relaxed now for so long and immediate protection from the original vaccines waning, a variant that evades the vaccine has been a growing concern in the epidemiologic community. Right now CDC notes that 1 in 3 of us live in an area of medium risk, and 1 in 5 in an area of high risk. The US has been seeing waves of over 100,000 new cases a day for the past 6 weeks, and the wave is – as it has always done – moving from the coasts to the inland. Hospitalizations are also increasing, particularly among the elderly.

Boosters – even with the original vaccine – are critical to keeping up the antibody levels to provide quick response, whether for a primary infection or a re-infection. So is vaccination in the very young; vaccines are now approved for as low as 6 months of age.

In good news, on June 30<sup>th</sup> FDA recommended that COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers develop bivalent (two-component) COVID-19 booster vaccines, which will target the newer Omicron subvariants BA.4 and BA.5. The FDA recommendation is based on the recently convened Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee meeting held on June 28 that voted in favor of including a component of the Omicron variant in the COVID-19 booster vaccines for use later this year. As a result of this new recommendation, Pfizer and Moderna would be required to modify the design of their respective vaccine boosters to target the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants, work that is already underway. The FDA expects to start administering these new vaccines later this year during the early to mid-fall season.

What does it mean for churches...? Pay attention to the trends and numbers in your city/county and have Session re-assess their policies and requirements on an ongoing basis. Personally, I am back to masking and distancing in large crowded spaces. I don't like it either 😊.

Be safe. Stay healthy. Be blessed.

Lisa