

## **Letter to the Community: December 7, 2021**

Hello Thurston County! I wanted to update you on the COVID-19 pandemic in Thurston County. Over the weekend a case of the omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was identified in Thurston County. This is an expected event as cases have been detected in more than twenty countries throughout the world and in one-third of the U.S. states. It was first identified in specimens collected on November 11, 2021, in Botswana and November 14, 2021, in South Africa and was reported to the World Health Organization on November 24, 2021. It was designated a [Variant of Concern](#) by the WHO on November 26, 2021 and by the United States on November 30, 2021. The first case in the United States was identified in San Francisco, California on December 1, 2021.

We are still learning about the variant. Preliminary data suggest that it is likely more transmissible than the delta variant, however there is still much to be learned about disease severity. We are learning more about the potential for reinfections for people who were previously infected with a different variant. While we anticipate that the currently available vaccines will protect vaccinated individuals from severe illness, hospitalizations and death, scientists are still learning about the rate of breakthrough infections with this variant. The delta variant continues to be the dominant circulating variant in Washington State and the United States as a whole.

While the variant is new, effective ways to prevent spread remain the same: avoid crowded areas, wear masks in public indoor spaces, stay home and get tested when you experience symptoms or if you find out you have been exposed or when instructed by public health. Getting vaccinated and receiving additional doses and booster dose when you are eligible are essential ways to not only protect against severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19 but also to slow transmission and reduce the potential for new variants to emerge.

This is a new challenge, but I know that if we continue to use the tools that we have, we can slow the spread of this variant and continue our progress towards bringing this pandemic to an end.

Wishing you the best of health,

Dr. Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH  
Health Officer, Thurston County