ASAN

AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK

Plain Language Edition

What you need to know about the Omicron variant and the COVID-19 vaccine

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What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a bad disease. It makes people very sick. COVID-19 has spread around the world. You can learn more about COVID-19 by reading our fact sheet on the COVID-19 vaccine.

What is the Omicron variant?

COVID-19 is caused by a **virus**. Viruses are a kind of germ. There are different kinds of the COVID-19 virus. These different kinds of COVID-19 are called **variants**. **Omicron** is one of the variants. That means Omicron is a kind of COVID-19.

Omicron is much more contagious than the first kind of COVID-19 virus. That means it can spread a lot more easily. With the original COVID-19 virus, each sick person would probably get 3 other people sick. With the Omicron variant, each sick person will probably get 10 other people sick.

People who catch the Omicron variant are less likely to get very sick or die. But we need to take Omicron seriously! Omicron is still a kind of COVID-19. Omicron can still hurt and kill people.

What about other variants?

There are other variants of the COVID-19 virus. Another variant is the Delta variant. The Delta variant is still happening.

It is normal that there are different variants of COVID-19. All viruses have variants. Viruses change and sometimes the changes make a new variant. Some variants go away fast. Some variants are stronger and hard to get rid of.

All variants are different. Vaccines help stop new variants from starting. Vaccine boosters also help stop new variants. The vaccines protect well against all the variants. Wearing a mask will also help protect you against all the variants.

Do the vaccines still work?

There are now COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccines are shots. The **COVID-19 vaccines** help protect you against COVID-19. You can learn more about the vaccines in our fact sheet on the COVID-19 vaccine. You can learn about booster shots in our fact sheet on booster shots.

In the United States, the COVID-19 vaccines are free. Anyone 5 years old or older can get one. The vaccines work *really well* to protect you from getting really sick with COVID-19. The vaccines work *really well* to keep you from dying from COVID-19. The vaccines also protect you from catching COVID-19 at all.

The COVID-19 vaccines work well against the Omicron variant. The vaccines can keep you from catching the Omicron variant. The vaccines can keep you from getting sick with the Omicron variant. The vaccines can keep you from dying from the Omicron variant.

What is a breakthrough case?

A breakthrough case is when you catch COVID-19 even when you are fully vaccinated. It is called a breakthrough case because the virus "breaks through" the vaccine protection. A lot of breakthrough cases are because of the Omicron variant. Remember, the Omicron variant spreads a lot easier. That means more people get sick with it. Some of those people who get sick will be vaccinated. So, some of the Omicron cases will be breakthrough cases.

You might have heard about breakthrough cases on the news. It can sound like breakthrough cases are very common. But breakthrough cases are not that common! And most breakthrough cases are mild. People with breakthrough cases usually don't get very sick. They usually don't need to go to the hospital. They usually don't die from COVID-19. Most COVID-19 cases are not breakthrough cases. Most people who catch COVID-19 are not vaccinated.

You can still catch COVID-19 and the Omicron variant if you are vaccinated. But your chances of catching it are much smaller. And if you do catch COVID-19, you will probably not get very sick.

Do I still need to wear a mask if I am vaccinated?

Yes. You should wear a mask even if you have been vaccinated. Vaccinated people are less likely to catch COVID-19. But vaccinated people who are sick with COVID-19 can still spread it. Masks work really well at stopping COVID-19 from spreading. You can learn more about masks in our factsheet on masks.

What should I do if I'm vaccinated?

If you are vaccinated, you should continue doing the things you were doing before. Get a vaccine booster when you can. See our guide on boosters to learn more. Keep wearing a mask. Keep staying home if you can. Keep washing your hands.

What should I do if I'm not vaccinated?

If you are not vaccinated, you should get vaccinated. You can ask your doctor about getting vaccinated. You can also go to vaccines.gov. That is a website that will help you find a place to get vaccinated. And you should also continue doing the things you were doing before. Keep wearing a mask. Keep staying home if you can. Keep washing your hands.

Why should I get vaccinated and wear a mask?

The Omicron variant spreads very easily. The Omicron variant happened because the virus changed. The virus changed because people didn't get vaccinated. The virus changed because people stopped wearing masks. We can stop the Omicron variant from spreading more. We can stop the virus from changing more. We can do this by wearing masks. We can do this by getting vaccinated.

But getting vaccinated isn't just about stopping the virus from changing more. Getting vaccinated also helps keep you safe from COVID-19. Getting vaccinated means you are less likely to catch COVID-19. It also means that you are **much less likely** to get really sick or die from COVID-19.

And there are other people who can't get vaccinated. Kids under 5 can't get vaccinated yet. COVID and Omicron are especially dangerous for them. Some people who are very sick can get vaccinated but it might not work as well. COVID and Omicron are especially dangerous for them. A few people with disabilities can't wear masks. So they are counting on the rest of us to get vaccinated and wear masks. So the rest of us need to get vaccinated and wear masks.

A lot of people are getting really sick because of Omicron. Some need to go to the hospital because they are so sick. That means hospitals are getting too crowded. They can't help everyone they need to help. If less people get sick with Omicron, then less people need to go to the hospital. That means more people can get help at the hospital for other reasons.

When can we go back to normal?

We don't know when we can go back to normal. Nobody knows exactly when we can go back to normal. It's scary and frustrating. But the more people get vaccinated, the sooner we can go back to normal. The more people keep wearing masks, the sooner we can go back to normal. We need to get vaccinated. We need to keep wearing our masks. That is how we will stop COVID-19. Then we can go back to normal.

Words to Know

Booster

A booster is an extra vaccine that you get to remind your body how to fight a germ

Breakthrough case

When you catch COVID-19 even if you have gotten the COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19

A bad disease that has spread around the world. It makes people very sick and can kill people

COVID-19 vaccine

A shot that can keep you from getting COVID-19.

Omicron

A variant of the virus that causes COVID-19. It can spread a lot more easily than the original kind of the virus.

Variants

Different kinds of a virus. The virus that causes COVID-19 has variants.

Virus

A kind of germ

To Learn More

- Plain Language COVID-19 Resources: https://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/covid-pl/

- A Self-Advocate's Guide to COVID-19: https://gmsavt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A_Self_Advocates_Guide_to_COVID-19_2020.pdf

- COVID-19 Vaccine Information in Plain Language: https://gmsavt.org/resources/covid-19-vaccine-information-in-plain-language

- COVID-19 Vaccine Facts for the Developmental Disabilities Community: https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/publications/documents/COVID19VaccineFactsDDCommunity-F.pdf

- "Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine" Social Story: https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/publications/documents/GettingACOVID19VaccineSocialStoryIDD-F.pdf

- Coronavirus/COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions: https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/AIR-Coronavirus-FAQs-508.pdf

- Infographic about COVID-19 Vaccines: https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/c/coronavirus/coronavirus-vaccines-infographic

- Myths and Facts About the COVID-19 Vaccine: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html

- Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Vaccine: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html

- Easy to Read COVID-19 Safety: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/easy-to-read/

- "Care for yourself one small way each day" Fact Sheet: https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/care-for-yourself/pdfs/General-Public-Care-for-Yourself.pdf

- COVID-19 Information for People with Developmental Disabilities: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/humandevelopment/covid-19/developmental-behavioral-disorders.html

- COVID-19 Materials for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Care Providers: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/humandevelopment/COVID-19-Materials-for-People-with-IDD.html

- Baltimore City Health Department infographics about variants: https://www.facebook.com/BaltimoreHealth/photos/pcb.10159244388310642/101592443854706

- Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health infographics about how well vaccines work: https://www.facebook.com/JohnsHopkinsSPH/photos/pcb.10158131891551245/10158131889621245

- vaccines.gov homepage: https://www.vaccines.gov/

- Variants of the Virus (CDC) (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variants.html

- Omicron Variant: What You Need to Know (Not Easy-Read/ Plain Language): https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/omicron-variant.html

- Variants of SARS-COV-2 (Not Easy-Read/ Plain Language): https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-%28covid-19%29-variants-of-sars-cov-2

- Project N95 (Not Easy-Read/ Plain Language): https://www.projectn95.o