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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 Update: Omicron Preparedness in Lake County *An Important Message from Gary Pace, MD, MPH*

LAKE COUNTY, CA (December 30, 2021) – As we recover from holiday festivities, risks associated with COVID-19 and the Omicron Variant continue to grow. While Omicron has not yet been identified in Lake County, surrounding counties are finding it. Omicron almost certainly is spreading through our community.

We anticipate a large climb in cases in the coming weeks, and encourage businesses, schools, and families to prepare for many people testing positive and getting sick. Unvaccinated people are considered especially vulnerable to severe illness.

Statewide, we are seeing rapid increases in cases, with a slower increase in the hospitalizations. Death rates have remained stable. The lower proportion of serious illness may be due to Omicron causing milder disease, or simply lag time from catching the virus and having the infection become severe. Hospitals locally and around the state are pretty full, as is often the case this time of year. Further surges in COVID cases could quickly become overwhelming.

Businesses and healthcare facilities are concerned about staffing. If large numbers of workers get sick and have to isolate, or have to quarantine as a close contact, it can cause real strain. It can be a challenge for businesses to stay open; the huge number of airline cancellations over the holidays were due to these types of staffing shortages.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/airlines-flight-cancellations-omicron-staffing/>

Vaccination with a booster seems to provide good protection from serious illness (as seen in the United States and around the world). Vaccinated people are still getting infected and can be contagious, although at lower rates than unvaccinated people. The booster offers important additional protection, and everyone who is eligible should get one ASAP.

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.12.10.21267594v2.full.pdf>

In Lake County, more than 1/3 of the total population, greater than 20,000 people, have no vaccine-related immunity (*residents younger than age 5 remain ineligible to be vaccinated, and 32-33% of those eligible are unvaccinated*). Our 8 regular ICU beds and ongoing shortages in EMS ambulance transport out of county make us particularly vulnerable if large numbers of people get ill at once.

The Health Department, County leaders, healthcare partners, and community organizations are all trying to work together to prepare, in case things get worse. Here are some tips are resources to limit your risks, and risks to your family and friends.

Masking: Indoor masking is required in the State of California through January 15, and strongly recommended. Consider upgrading to KN95 or N95 masks, when possible; Omicron appears especially able to transmit through the air.

PCR Testing: If you are symptomatic, or come in close contact with an infected person, get tested! Local PCR Testing resources are available at <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Coronavirus/Testing.htm>.

- The Optum Serve van provides PCR testing Monday-Saturday (7-11am, 12-4pm and 5-7pm) at various sites around the lake. Look at the website for specific locations. No appointment necessary.
- Testing can be accessed through some medical providers.

Antigen (Rapid) Testing: Before you go to indoor gatherings, take an Antigen Test; it can help determine if you are contagious. Currently experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19? Stay home, even if your rapid test is negative.

- Local schools are receiving 19,000 antigen tests to distribute in the near future to their students for at-home testing.
- Pharmacies sell at-home tests, though demand can outstrip supply.
- The Health Services Department is distributing some kits to agencies, churches, and other groups that have ability to provide tests to folks who can't afford to purchase them.
- Testing resources are listed at <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Coronavirus/Testing.htm>.

Vaccine: Without a doubt, the best strategy to slow this wave of Omicron-driven COVID-19 infections is to get fully vaccinated and boosted. If eligible and not vaccinated (or not yet boosted), find a site and get your shot! Local resources are regularly updated here: <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Coronavirus/Vaccines.htm>

- We are requesting state resources to help get a van that can set up at different locations around the county; we are hopeful mobile vaccine sites will be available in the coming weeks.
- Local pharmacies continue to provide vaccine at no cost.
- Some medical providers are giving vaccinations; locally, Sutter and Adventist Health are vaccinating non-patients.
- The Health Department is setting up some clinics and a limited number of home-visits for home-bound folks.
- Some non-profits are setting up special pop-ups in communities with particular need.

Treatment: Treatments are becoming available, but they are still in very short supply, so will be prioritized for people who are at high risk for bad outcomes.

- **Monoclonal antibodies.** Only Sotrovimab is thought to be effective against Omicron. It is in very short supply, and must be given by IV in a clinical setting.
- **Remdisivir.** Also given by IV, and in limited supply. Does seem to have some effect against Omicron.
- **Oral Medications.**
 - *Paxlovid* is just coming out, and in very limited supply. Obtained by prescription from your provider. Up to 80% effective in preventing hospitalization in high-risk people with mild disease. Doses are allocated by the state; Lake County is expected to receive 20 courses this week. The supply should increase in the future.
 - *Molnupirivir* is not thought to be as effective, and there are some concerns about side effects. Availability is a bit greater than *Paxlovid*; we are expecting 40 courses of treatment.

Hospital Surge: Currently, Lake County's hospitals are operating in their usual manner, but they are generally quite full. Regular contact is being maintained locally and with the state in order to ensure safe care. Please do not avoid going to the hospital now if you have a significant health need that requires attention.

In other parts of the world, the Omicron spike rose rapidly, then dropped 4-6 weeks later. We encourage people to take extra precautions in the next few weeks, especially if you are at higher risk or unvaccinated. Hopefully, this wave will pass fairly quickly, and we can return to a more regular lifestyle. Taking some extra steps these next few weeks could be critical in preventing severe outcomes.

Gary Pace, MD, MPH

More information is available at the following links:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/omicron-variant.html> "Omicron: What You Need to Know" (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html> (CDC's COVID-19 Vaccination "Myths and Facts")

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx> (Face coverings)

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/12/29/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/29/health/covid-vaccinations-boosters.html>

Are you interested in COVID-19 vaccination, but facing barriers? Call 707-263-8174.

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