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## **Cook County Public Health Officials Urge Continued Protections Against COVID-19**

*Vaccination, ventilation, and masking recommended as Omicron subvariants spread*

**Cook County, Ill.**— As two highly contagious Omicron subvariants of the COVID-19 virus are spreading in suburban Cook County, public health officials are strongly recommending that all residents take action to protect themselves and others.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is changing over time. We expect these changes and call these genetic variations of the virus variants or subvariants.

“Not all variants are created equal,” stated Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck, Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) Chief Operating Officer. “Some variants are really contagious and cause more severe disease, while others are more difficult to spread and result in milder disease.”

Right now, most COVID-19 infections in the Midwest are caused by the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants. These are more contagious than previous strains, including Delta, and can lead to more people being infected and gradual increases in hospitalizations. However, those who have been fully vaccinated and boosted are less likely to get seriously ill, hospitalized, or die from a COVID-19 infection with any variant or subvariant that has circulated to date.

CCDPH urges suburban Cook County residents to take the following actions to protect themselves and others from COVID-19 infection and serious illness.

- 1. Get Vaccinated and Boosted** – COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. COVID-19 boosters are recommended for everyone 5 years and older. To find out if you are eligible and up to date, visit the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov).
- 2. Ventilate** – Socialize outdoors if possible and avoid poorly-ventilated indoor settings and large gatherings, especially if you are at increased risk of severe complications from COVID-19. Ventilate indoor spaces by opening windows and using HEPA filter air purifiers. If you are meeting friends or family in-person, choose an outdoor location when possible and space out.
- 3. Mask Up** – CCDPH strongly recommends masking with a well-fitting high-quality mask, such as a KN95 or N95 respirator, when in public indoor spaces or other places, including outdoors where individuals near them may be unvaccinated. This is especially important for those who are considered at high risk for severe illness.
- 4. Get Tested** – Testing can tell you if you’re at risk of spreading COVID-19. Consider using a self-test before joining indoor gatherings with others who live outside your household. Test 3-4 days before the gathering and again the day of the event. Stock up on self-test kits at [accessCovidTests.org](https://www.accessCovidTests.org).

**5. Get Treated** – There are medications that can treat people at high risk of severe illness, to help prevent hospitalization and death. Treatments work best when started early. Contact your doctor as soon as you develop symptoms and/or test positive for COVID-19, to see if you are eligible for treatment.

By following these simple and effective steps, we can ride this wave together.

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