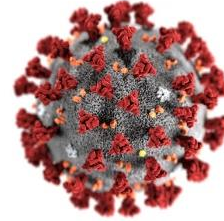




Mayor Brindle's COVID-19 Update December 30, 2021



Just one week ago, I shared that New Jersey had set another single-day record for COVID-19 cases for a second straight day, with 15,482 confirmed positive tests. Today, that number has risen to 27,975, and the number of confirmed positive tests reported in the last two days is higher than the total monthly cases reported in both October and November. The actual numbers of infection are likely much higher, as the officially reported data does not include home test results and those from many providers whose resources are simply too overwhelmed to enter rapid test results into the system. Statewide, hospitalizations continue to increase as well, reaching an 11-month high and up 243% from just a month ago.

The state's seven-day average for new confirmed positive tests is nearly double the average a week ago, and more than 739% higher than this time last month. The rate of transmission is 1.77.

Locally, there were 274 cases identified in Westfield between December 23 and December 29, up from 165 last week.

Here in Town Hall, we are beginning to see the impact of Omicron on our staff. We currently have 23 employees out of the office due to testing positive or quarantining from direct exposure. These absences span Public Works, Recreation, Building, Fire, Police, Engineering, and Public Works, and thankfully all positive cases appear to be presenting with mild symptoms to date.

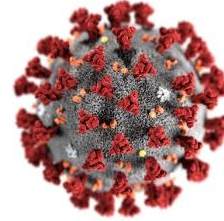
In addition to these absences, we have also been informed today by our crossing guard management company, ACMS, that they are seeing COVID staffing impacts that will affect the return to school next week. As of today, we expect to have 15 crossing guard posts vacant on Monday as a result of COVID-related absences, a number which of course may increase over the weekend. Coupled with the ten Police employees also absent, covering this many empty posts is not feasible, as we naturally need enough Police Officers available for ongoing public safety issues and any emergencies that arise. As a result, we anticipate a temporary reduction in the number of posts next week, and will focus our available resources on the posts with the highest pedestrian volume, which are those that are immediately adjacent to the schools. We will share an update before school begins on Monday so that everyone is aware of these temporary changes.

On the vaccination front, statewide rates have decreased by 17% from last week's rate, with an average of 38.8K doses administered per day. More than 6.4 million New Jersey residents are fully vaccinated, and more than 2.2 million people in the state have received third doses or boosters.

In Union County, 70% of the population is fully vaccinated. In Westfield, 98% of adults and 78% of our entire population is fully vaccinated. 51% of our 5-11 year-olds and 73% of 12-17 year-olds have received one dose of vaccine, and 56% of our eligible population has received a booster dose. Additional breakdowns by location and age group can be found at nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_dashboard.shtml. Note that the fully vaccinated data does not include booster shot information.



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As I shared in last week's update, our areas of focus to combat Omicron should include improving our youth vaccination and booster shot rates. Today, the media reported that the Food and Drug Administration is planning to expand Pfizer booster eligibility on Monday to 12 to 15-year-olds. The CDC's vaccine advisory committee is planning to meet by the middle of next week to vote on whether to recommend these changes.

Of course, indoor mask wearing in public settings is also an easy step we can all take to help mitigate the spread. And for those who traveled over the holiday break, please be sure to test upon your return to help prevent additional transmission.

I'd also like to remind everyone of these vaccination and testing resources:

- New Jersey residents can now request a free COVID-19 home test kit from the New Jersey Department of Health. For more information on home testing, or to access a full list of testing sites statewide, visit <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/testing>.
- Union County currently operates three free vaccination sites. For details or to make an appointment, visit ucnj.org/vax online or call the COVID-19 Call Center at 908-613-7829.
- Union County operates two free COVID-19 test sites, at Kean University on Mondays and Thursdays, and at Gerald B. Green Plaza in Plainfield on Wednesdays. For complete details and to make an appointment, visit ucnj.org/covid19, or call 908-613-7829.

Yesterday, the NJ Department of Health announced that the state is in the process of updating guidance documents for the general public to reflect CDC's guidance, which shortens the recommended time for isolation from ten to five days for individuals with COVID-19, if they do not have symptoms, followed by five days of wearing a mask when around others. There are also changes in guidance for COVID exposure, as well as for guidance specific to healthcare workers. You can read the full statement at nj.gov/health/news/2021/approved/20211229a.shtml. The Department expects to release its guidance documents in the coming days, which should also clarify how these policies will be implemented in schools, congregating living situations, and child care centers.

As you likely saw, School Superintendent Dr. Gonzalez communicated last evening that schools will operate on a half-day schedule next week to eliminate the higher risk lunch period upon return from the holiday break. He and Megan Avallone share the ongoing goal to keep schools open as long as it remains safe to do so, and they will of course continue to monitor COVID activity closely and its impact on the schools.

The reality is that Omicron is widespread. And while it may prove to be less severe in terms of illness in many cases, we are already seeing the disruptions it can cause in the workforce – which is why it's important to stay vigilant. Please get vaccinated, get boosted, and heed the advice of health officials. Thanks to everyone who continues to follow public health guidance and look out for the community.

The full Mayor's update is available [here](#).



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