

Eat This, Not That!

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I'm a Virus Expert and Here's How to Avoid Omicron

Heather Newgen | December 30, 2021



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Omicron is quickly spreading across the U.S. and while doctors are still learning about the variant, there are a few things we do know. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says "anyone with Omicron infection can spread the virus to others, even if they are vaccinated or don't have symptoms." In light of the news regarding Omicron, *Eat This, Not That! Health* talked to medical experts who explained ways to help avoid contracting the variant. Read on—and to ensure your health and the health of others, don't miss these Sure Signs You've Already Had COVID.

1. Omicron Is Highly Contagious



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According to Robert G. Lahita MD, Ph.D. ("Dr. Bob"), Director of the Institute for Autoimmune and Rheumatic Disease at Saint Joseph Health and author of the upcoming book *Immunity Strong* (January 5), "Omicron is extremely transmissible. The good news is that this virus seems to be less severe than other variants, like Delta. It's also showing a less likely chance of causing a loss of taste and smell in patients who get sick. However, because it's so transmissible, it's ripping through the population right now. Just being in a room with someone who has Omicron can lead to you getting infected. It is 70x more transmissible than the Delta variant."

2. Multiple Factors



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Infectious disease expert and pioneering scientific researcher **Dr. Serhat Gumrukcu** says: "With the constant spike in the number of Omicron positive cases, it's evident that a lot of factors have contributed to the most recent mutation. Some of the top ways people are contracting the virus are low vaccination rates, and lack of social distancing. Large social gatherings held in confined spaces with individuals who are not 100% fully vaccinated have also led to an increase in COVID-19 cases."

3. Get Vaccinated



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Dr. Bob says, "I would say the best thing you can do to avoid catching it is to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Get all of the doses and get boosted as well. In the meantime, social distance wherever possible, frequently sanitize your hands and surfaces you touch (like desks in conference rooms or classrooms), and wear a mask—especially in indoor areas with a lot of people or where there is poor ventilation. I suggest a disposable mask rather than a cloth one if you're able to obtain it."

4. Look Out for Your Neighbors



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It's important to maintain a healthy diet and stay physically active, especially during this time, but that doesn't mean you're invincible, says Dr. Luke Palmisano MD, FACEP, CFL1 Associate Medical Director: Emergency Department Dignity Health California Hospital. "I hear a lot of the healthy, well-eating, fit population get upset and not want to wear a mask nor get vaccinated. Their excuse is "I won't get that sick and don't need to do these things." The sad part is they are missing the point — it is not about them, it is about their neighbors. A lot of us can get relatively fit, but some are just sicker due to genetic changes. Some people just get old and are relatively less healthy. Some of our lower income neighbors live in a food desert and don't have access to good quality nutrition. And while these folks can make healthy choices among their options, they might not reach the pinnacle of health that some other folks might."

5. Get Tested



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The CDC recommends getting tested if you think you have Omicron or have been exposed to someone who has the variant.

"Two types of tests are used to test for current infection: nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) and antigen tests. NAAT and antigen tests can only tell you if you have a current infection.

- Individuals can use the COVID-19 Viral Testing Tool to help determine what kind of test to seek.

- Additional tests would be needed to determine if your infection was caused by Omicron.
- Visit your state, tribal, local, or territorial health department's website to look for the latest local information on testing.
- Self-tests can be used at home or anywhere, are easy to use, and produce rapid results.
 - If your self-test has a positive result, stay home or isolate for 10 days, wear a mask if you have contact with others, and call your healthcare provider.
 - If you have any questions about your self-test result, call your healthcare provider or public health department."

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