

HEALTH ALERT NETWORK | HEALTH ADVISORY | December 24, 2021

Omicron (B.1.1.529) Variant Update North Dakota

This health update provides situational awareness regarding the emergence of the Omicron variant in North Dakota. On December 19, 2021, the Laboratory Services Section of the North Dakota Department of Health confirmed the first cases of Omicron in North Dakota residents. On December 23, Laboratory Services confirmed another 13 cases of Omicron in North Dakota residents. These cases are residents of Burleigh, Cass, Morton, Rolette, and Stark Counties. Of these, six were unvaccinated, three had two doses of vaccine, three had two doses plus boosters and one had two doses plus a booster but was within the 2-week window of receiving the booster dose. None of the cases were hospitalized.

In addition to the confirmed Omicron cases, Laboratory Services is reporting a significant increase in PCR positive specimens that have demonstrated the S gene target failure (SGTF) likely indicating that these specimens are also positive for the Omicron variant. These confirmed and probable cases are dispersed widely throughout the state. In addition, on December 23, wastewater surveillance confirmed Omicron in wastewater samples from Barnes, Cass, Morton, Ward and Williams County community wastewater samples. The earliest wastewater sample that confirmed Omicron was collected December 14.

Monoclonal antibody therapy options for treating Omicron is limited to Sotrovimab. Today, the federal government issued a statement that it will no longer allocate bamlanivimab and etesevimab, etesevimab alone, or REGEN-COV to states. With this rapid emergence of Omicron as marked by the SGTF specimens and those confirmed by whole genome sequencing, providers treating COVID-19 patients with monoclonal antibodies should be treating with Sotrovimab.

North Dakota will be receiving an allocation of Sotrovimab on December 27, 2021 along with supplies of the newly authorized antivirals, Molnupiravir and Paxlovid. More information will be coming out regarding the availability of these therapy options in the near future.

For question regarding Omicron surveillance, providers can call Disease Control at 701-328-2378. Questions regarding SARS-CoV-2 laboratory testing, including variant testing can be directed to Laboratory Services at 701-328-6272 and questions regarding the availability of monoclonal antibodies and antivirals can be directed to the Department Operations Center at 701-328-0707.

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##This message was distributed to state and local health officers, state and local epidemiologists, state and local laboratory directors, public information officers, HAN coordinators, and clinician organizations##