

The state of the pandemic: Suggested talking points

- **The U.S. continues to see hundreds of COVID-19 deaths per day.**
 - Many individuals and organizations in the U.S. are operating as if the pandemic is nearing an end.
 - But the virus is still killing [an average of about 400 people per day](#).
 - The virus remains a risk, especially for the elderly, the immunocompromised, and people who are not up to date on their vaccinations.
 - COVID-19 and its potentially long-lasting symptoms are unpredictable, and we don't know what this winter has in store.
- **New variants could drive a winter surge.**
 - Omicron subvariant BA.5 continues to be dominant in the U.S., but BA.4.6 is starting to gain a foothold.
 - Internationally, new variants [BJ.1](#), [BA.2.3](#), and [BA.2.75.2](#) are all gaining attention, and each of them has mutations that could allow for significant immune escape.
 - One of these new variants could cause a winter wave, but there is not enough data yet to make any clear predictions.
- **We have the tools to stay protected this winter: COVID-19 boosters, masks, regular testing, and treatment options.**
 - Despite the continued risks, we are in a different stage of the pandemic thanks to key tools that we can use to lower our risk.
 - Getting an updated COVID-19 booster is crucial to staying protected. The updated COVID-19 boosters are bivalent vaccines that include components from both the original COVID-19 virus and the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants.
 - Precautions like wearing masks and testing regularly are still important, especially as there are fewer mandated COVID-19 prevention measures.
 - Wear high-quality, well-fitting masks in indoor public spaces and if community transmission is rising in your area.
 - [Test regularly and at least two times 48 hours apart](#) to avoid getting a false negative, particularly if you have symptoms, have been exposed, or are planning to travel or attend a gathering.
 - Be prepared for [the chance that you do get infected](#) and know your [options for treatment](#).

The state of the pandemic: Frequently asked questions

1. Is COVID-19 like the flu yet?

No. COVID-19 is still killing an average of about 400 people per day. If deaths continue at this pace, the annual death toll would be 146,000. A bad flu season [kills about 52,000 people](#). There is [some debate over how COVID-19 deaths are counted](#) and how COVID-19 risk compares to that of the flu now that the majority of the population has protection from either prior infection or vaccination. But COVID-19 and its potentially long-lasting symptoms remain unpredictable, and we don't know what this winter has in store.

2. What should we expect in the coming months?

Omicron subvariant BA.5 [continues to be dominant in the U.S.](#), but BA.4.6 is starting to gain a foothold and may be the reason COVID-19 virus levels in wastewater [have been rising in the Northeast](#). Whether this will translate into a rise in cases is yet to be seen, though BA.4.6 does not have significant mutations for immune evasion. Elsewhere in the world, other variants are gaining attention, including [BJ.1](#), [BA.2.3](#), and [BA.2.75.2](#), each of which has mutations that could allow for significant immune escape. If this proves true, one of them could cause a winter wave. At present, however, there is not enough data to make any clear predictions.

3. What can you do to stay safe?

Get your [updated COVID-19 booster](#). These boosters are formulated to better protect against the most recently circulating COVID-19 variant. Besides staying up to date on your vaccinations, the same COVID-19 precautions from earlier in the pandemic continue to apply and are arguably now more important since [the responsibility of risk reduction has shifted from institutions onto individuals](#). Wear high-quality, well-fitting masks in indoor public spaces and if community transmission is rising in your area. [Test regularly and at least two times 48 hours apart](#) to avoid getting a false negative. Be prepared for [the chance that you do get infected](#) and know your [options for treatment](#).