

If You Test Positive for Covid

As the Omicron variant continues to spread around the country, many more people, including those who have been vaccinated, will test positive for coronavirus.

Here is advice, excerpted from a New York Times article, from physicians and infectious disease experts about steps to take after a positive test or if you find out you've been in close contact with an infected person.

I just tested positive. What do I do now?

If you're in public or around people when you get the bad news, put on a mask immediately. Then isolate yourself as quickly as possible, even if you don't have symptoms. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends isolating for five days if you are asymptomatic or if you do not have a fever and your other symptoms are improving, followed by five days of wearing a mask when you are around people. The C.D.C. previously recommended isolating for 10 days. If you have a fever, the agency advises you to stay home until the fever resolves.

What does it mean to isolate?

If you live with roommates or family, try to separate yourself from other people (and animals) as much as possible. "You should take yourself out of society," said Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious disease expert at the University of California, San Francisco. "Wall yourself up in a cocoon."

Isolating in a home with other people may be difficult, but do the best you can. That means staying in your room, away from other members of the household, even for meals. Someone should deliver food to your bedroom door if possible. If the home has more than one bathroom, designate one just for the infected person. If the infected person is a child or older person who needs assistance, both the caregiver and the infected person should wear a mask when the caregiver enters the room, and open the windows if possible.

If others are in the house, always wear a high-quality mask when you leave your room. Everyone should mask up in shared spaces. After using a shared bathroom, disinfect the toilet seat and handle, as well as the faucet handles, soap dispenser, counter and light switch. Close the lid before you flush, and turn on the exhaust fan. Open windows to improve ventilation in shared areas.

The people living in your household should take precautions, but they don't need to panic about getting infected too, especially if they're vaccinated and boosted. "The household rate of contracting Covid from someone is not 100 percent by a long shot, even with the more transmissible variants," said Dr. Paul Sax, an infectious disease expert at Brigham and Women's Hospital and professor at Harvard Medical School.

While it can help incrementally to continue to wipe down shared spaces, "the most important thing is keeping people from breathing air that is filled with germs," said Tara Kirk Sell, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. If you have a HEPA air filter, place it in or outside your bedroom.

If you've tested positive and feel well, you can take a walk outdoors and get fresh air. If you're in a city where you will cross paths with other people, wear a mask and keep your distance.

Should I take a second test to confirm the result?

If you tested positive after taking a rapid home test, you may want to take a second home test using a different brand or go to a testing center to confirm the result. False positives aren't common with home tests, but they can happen. Even so, you should assume the positive result is correct, wear a mask and avoid close contact with other people until you get retested. If your positive test came from a laboratory, a second test isn't necessary.

Can I find out if I got Omicron?

No. In most cases, you won't know which variant of coronavirus you've caught and your lab test typically won't tell you. In general, the guidance on isolation, monitoring and treatment does not change based on which variant infected you.

Who do I tell that I tested positive?

Think about where you've been and who might have inhaled your germs. Contact your employer and let them know. Most workplaces have protocols in place for contact tracing when an employee tests positive. You also want to alert anyone with whom you've spent time, going back at least two days before you got tested or started having symptoms, said Dr. Sax. The C.D.C. defines a close contact as someone who was less than six feet from you for 15 minutes or more.

It may feel overwhelming, or even shameful, to tell people about your positive test, said Dr. Ashish K. Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health. "A lot of people think it's some failure if you get infected," Dr. Jha said. "This is an incredibly contagious variant. A lot of people are going to get it. That is not a moral failure."

Don't forget to tell your doctor too, particularly if you have an underlying medical condition, like high blood pressure or diabetes, that puts you at higher risk.

If the infected person is a child, call your pediatrician. You also need to call your child's school, as well as anyone they've had close contact with at play dates, parties or other activities.

What treatment options do I have?

Monitor your symptoms. You can use a pulse oximeter to keep track of your blood oxygen levels. Most healthy people will get an oxygen reading around 95 to 99 percent. You should seek medical advice if the reading drops quickly or the level dips to 93 percent or lower. The devices can be less accurate for people with darker skin, so pay attention to the trend. If your reading drops by four points, it's worth checking in with a doctor. You should also see a doctor if you take a turn for the worse, have trouble breathing or have any symptom that causes you concern.

Excerpted from [Dec. 28, 2021 New York Times Article](#) by Dani Blum and Nicole Stock