Omicron Variant Detected in Massachusetts

Residents urged to get COVID-19 vaccine, booster

BOSTON (December 4, 2021) — The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that genetic sequencing has identified the COVID-19 Omicron variant for the first time in a case in Massachusetts. The individual is a female in her 20s and a resident of Middlesex County who traveled out of state. She is fully vaccinated, has experienced mild disease, and did not require hospitalization. The variant was identified through sequencing performed at New England Biolabs.

While Omicron is classified by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization as a Variant of Concern, scientists are still working to determine how it may compare with the predominant Delta variant in terms of transmissibility and disease severity. There is some limited evidence that Omicron could be more transmissible than other COVID-19 virus variants, including Delta. This variant is being monitored closely by public health authorities around the world, and more information about what we know about Omicron is available on the CDC website.

All three COVID-19 vaccines in use in the U.S have been shown to be highly protective against severe disease resulting in hospitalization or death due to known COVID-19 variants and remain the single best way for people to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community from COVID-19. There are over 1,000 locations across the Commonwealth to get vaccinated or receive a booster. The vaccine is free, and no ID or insurance is required for vaccination. Visit vaxfinder.mass.gov for a list of vaccination locations.

Other public health prevention measures that help stop the spread of COVID-19 variants include: getting tested and staying home if you are sick, frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer, following masking requirements, and telling your close contacts if you test positive for COVID-19 so they can take appropriate steps. To learn more about protecting yourself from COVID-19, visit www.mass.gov/covidvaccine.

Residents are also urged to enable MassNotify on their smartphone. The service can be accessed through both Android and iPhone settings; it is NOT an application that can be obtained through an app store. This private and anonymous service notifies users of a potential exposure to COVID-19 so they may take the appropriate precautions. For more information and instructions on enabling MassNotify on your smartphone, visit https://www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-more-about-massnotify.

The State Public Health Laboratory, the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, and several hospital and academic laboratories have all contributed to sequencing efforts in Massachusetts during the pandemic. This sequencing data contributes to the tracking of clusters and patterns of disease spread. This in-state laboratory capacity to sequence variants allows Massachusetts to not have to rely on out-of-state laboratories.