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Health Officer/Manager
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Dear Property Owner, Facility Manager and/or Resident:

We would like to first and foremost congratulate you on an amazing job curtailing this pandemic mid-year. Your efforts in complying with City, State and Federal guidelines exemplified the strength our residents endured as we overcame the past couple of waves of infection. Sadly, we are *currently* facing a tsunami of infections in the vaccinated and unvaccinated population. This attributes to the new variant known as Omicron.

New Variant - Omicron

Omicron was identified in November 2021. The WHO classified the Omicron as a “variant of concern,” a designation for potentially dangerous variants that prioritizes vigilant tracking to better study and understand the mechanics of the variant. The Omicron variant has become the predominant variant across Europe and North America. In the U.S. as of December 18, Omicron accounts for nearly 75% of the total number of SARS-CoV-2 infections. Given this rapid takeover, we can expect Omicron to cause nearly all cases of COVID-19 by the end of the year. This variant can infect people who has already been infected and those who are vaccinated.

Omicron variant is spreading faster all over the world and has impacted the City of Newark tremendously. The positivity rate went from below 2% in June of 2021 and has skyrocketed to 36% this month. This is a clear indication that the virus is highly transmissible and extra layer of protection needs to be put in place.

Isolation/Quarantine

CDC is shortening the recommended time for isolation from 10 days for people with COVID-19 to 5 days, if asymptomatic. If you have symptoms, the recommendation is to isolate for up to 10 days or until symptoms subside but isolation should not be shorter than 5 days. Healthcare workers with COVID-19 who are without symptoms can return to work after 7 days with a negative test. CDC is also updating the recommended quarantine period for those who are not fully vaccinated, not yet boosted and exposed to a confirmed COVID positive case. CDC now recommends quarantine for 5 days followed by strict mask use.

Visitation

While residents have the right to receive visitors at all times and make choices about aspects of their life in the facility that are significant to them, there may be times when the scope and severity of an outbreak warrants the health department to intervene with the facility’s operations. **At this present time, the City is recommending pausing visitation due to the high positivity rate. If visitation is necessary, only vaccinated visitors are allowed and should be masked at all times and screening should be done (ex: taking temperatures, complete questionnaire, etc.).**

The City will continue to monitor cases in our most vulnerable population including seniors and residents at Long-term Care facilities as we continue to modify recommendations based on science and data.

Mask mandate

In response to this explosion of cases, the Mayor has signed an executive order mandating mask wearing throughout the City indoors and outdoors as of December 20, 2021. The mandate applies to EVERYONE regardless of the vaccination status. Other mandates may be imposed in the future to take the necessary steps to safeguard and ensure the health, safety and welfare of the citizens throughout the City.

Vaccination/boosters

Omicron remains sensitive to the vaccine. That's why you need a third dose of the vaccine to help protect you from serious illness and hospitalization. If you infect someone who hasn't been vaccinated or who is vaccinated but is weakened, that person can become seriously ill with COVID-19. A third shot of the vaccine is therefore important to protect yourself against disease. Boosters are available right now. Booster eligibility is as follows:

- Ages 18 years and up
- 6 months after the 2nd dose of Pfizer or Moderna
- 2 months after single dose of J&J

The CDC and other experts have said that the majority of people who are exposed to this new variant have mild symptoms and recover due to the vast majority of residents who are vaccinated. Currently, reports indicate that 84% of Newark residents 12 years and up have received at least one dose and 70% are fully vaccinated. However, this variant is a public health concern and the City is advising people to remain vigilant when going out to the community. You can follow these simple steps to avoid the spread of the disease:

- **GET VACCINATED!! (vaccines available for age 5 and up)**
- **GET BOOSTED!! (booster shots available for age 18 and up)**
- **GET TESTED!!**
- **Wear a mask correctly over your nose and mouth when indoors and outdoors**
- **Wash/sanitize your hands frequently**
- **Practice social distancing (6 feet away) if you do not know vaccination status**
- **Refrain from accepting visitors who are not fully vaccinated**
- **Cover coughs and sneezes (blow in tissue and throw away or cover with elbow)**
- **Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick**
- **Constantly ventilate your rooms by opening a window or installing an air purifier**
- **Clean and disinfect common areas, surfaces, phones, keyboards, door knobs, etc.**

The Newark Department of Health continues to follow CDC and New Jersey Department of Health guidelines. Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the health department at 973-733-7592. We hope this information is helpful and we thank you for your continued cooperation as we get through this surge.

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s1227-isolation-quarantine-guidance.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/omicron-variant.html>

<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-39-nh-revised.pdf>

In Health,

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