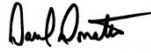




Town of Palm Beach Fire-Rescue



TO: Kirk Blouin, Town Manager

FROM: Darrel Donatto, Fire Rescue Chief 

SUBJECT: January 2022 Update on COVID-19 pandemic

DATE: January 10, 2022

The Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is our fifth wave of rapidly increasing infections. As bad as we thought the other waves were, this graphic puts the highly contagious nature of Omicron in perspective. Compared to what we considered rapidly spreading in the past, Omicron has shown its contagion is far worse.

Daily infections and testing

Estimated infections are the number of people we estimate are infected with COVID-19 each day, including those not tested.

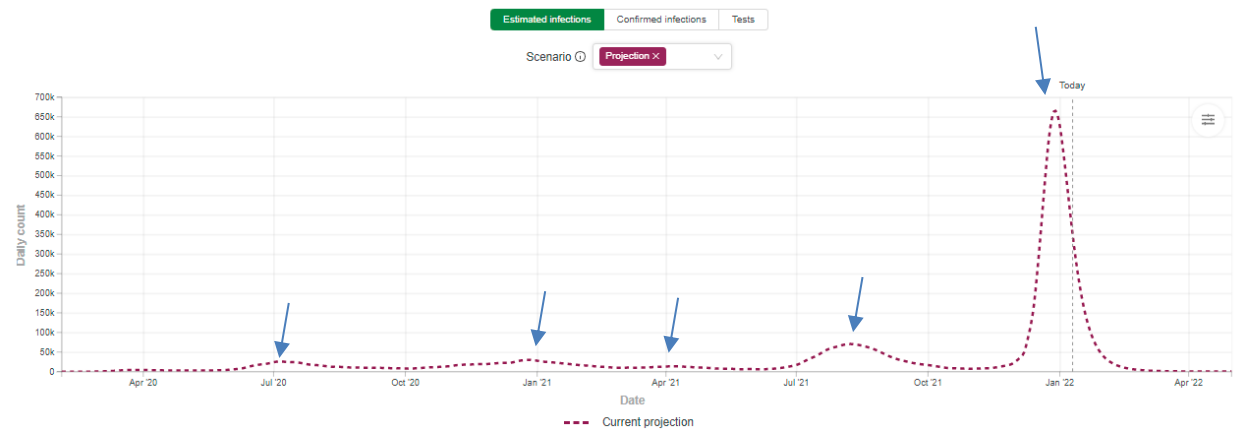


Figure 1 - Data from <https://covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america/florida?view=infections-testing&tab=trend&test=infections>

However, the good news is we may be past the peak in the State of Florida, or if not, we are close to the peak in the rise of cases. We should see a rapid decline in new cases as herd immunity takes effect. This mid-January peak is supported by data from the University of Florida and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

That does not mean we are out of danger; as has been said before, we will simply be past the peak of this wave. Scientists predict that SARS-CoV-2 will become the fifth coronavirus to be endemic, meaning it will permanently establish itself in humans, alongside four other 'seasonal' coronaviruses that cause relatively mild colds. And like Delta and Omicron, future variants are likely.

While the Omicron variant appears to be milder than previous variants, it does not mean that it does not represent a serious threat. Those over 65 and those with immunocompromised are still at serious risk of hospitalizations and death. 15%-20% of the patients admitted to ICU have COVID-19.

Here in Palm Beach County, the latest data was published on January 7 and shows that the positivity rate for the week of December 31 through January 6 was 34%, compared to 30.6% on the prior report. You may recall that we were at 2.5% positivity just before Thanksgiving. We should be back near those numbers sometime near the end of February.

In the meantime, everyone needs to do their part not to contribute to the spread of COVID-19. This means wearing a mask when indoors or close to others, maintaining a social distance space when possible, washing their hands frequently, and getting vaccinated and boosted.

For those who believe they were exposed to someone with COVID-19, and they are unvaccinated or are more than six months out from their second mRNA dose (or more than two months after the J&J vaccine) and not yet boosted, the CDC now recommends quarantine for five days followed by strict mask use for an additional five days. Individuals who have received their booster shot do not need to quarantine following exposure but should wear a mask ten days after the exposure. For all those exposed, best practice would also include a test for SARS-CoV-2 at day five after exposure.

For all those who have symptoms of COVID-19, they should immediately quarantine until a negative test confirms symptoms are not attributable to COVID-19. And, for all those who test positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, they should isolate at home for five days, and if they do not have symptoms or their symptoms are resolving after the five days, they can leave their house but should continue to wear a mask around others for five additional days.

To help residents gain access to testing, the Palm Beach Police and Fire Foundation has provided Rapid Antigen Test Kits, and Palm Beach Fire Rescue administered those tests to residents by appointment at the South Fire Station. There were 274 appointments made for Tuesday, January 4, 2022, and 272 appointments made for Thursday, January 6, 2022. Of the 546 appointments, 348 residents were tested. Numerous people did not show up for their scheduled appointment or were not tested because they could not demonstrate residency. Of the 348 people who were tested, 65 were found to be positive. This equates to an 18.8% positivity rate.

Based on the demand and the Palm Beach Police and Fire Foundation's commitment to providing the testing resources, testing appointments were opened for Tuesday, January 11, 2022, and Thursday, January 13, 2022. As of this writing, 272 appointments have been made for January 11, and 216 appointments have been made for January 13.

In December, Palm Beach Fire Rescue had to put its monoclonal antibody treatment (Regeneron) program on hold as supplies of Regeneron were unavailable. We continue to try and obtain more of this lifesaving medication but are at the mercy of the State, which is at the mercy of the Federal government. If we can get it, we will give it.

We will quickly come out of this wave, but we do not know what the next variant will bring. Getting vaccinated remains the best defense. The data is clear: those vaccinated and who have received their booster shot are far less likely to suffer serious illness, hospitalization, or death.