



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First Omicron Cases Detected in Allegheny County Residents

PITTSBURGH – Testing has confirmed the first two cases of omicron in an Allegheny County resident.

The first, from a specimen collected from a male adult on December 7, was confirmed to be the omicron variant on December 22. The second case, also found in a male adult, was from a specimen collected December 13 and was confirmed to be the omicron variant on December 23.

“Omicron is highly contagious and is causing daily cases to rapidly increase in other parts of the country and world,” Health Department Director Debra Bogen said Wednesday during the county’s regular COVID briefing. “I expect we will see a rapid rise in the omicron variant in our county in the coming days to weeks.”

Dr. Bogen continues to urge people to protect themselves and others by getting vaccinated, wearing masks, maintaining social distance, and getting tested when symptoms set in. Resources, including a Testing Site Locator and a Vaccine Provider Map, are available on the county’s [website](#)

The Allegheny County Health Department, which is the primary agency charged with COVID mitigation in the county, is using wastewater surveillance to track the spread of COVID-19 and variants such as omicron. SARS-CoV2 virus in wastewater can be a leading indicator of a case surge and can be used to track new variants. To conduct this surveillance, the Health Department works with three of the county’s wastewater utilities which collect and treat sewage from more than 80% of the county’s residents: ALCOSAN, Pennsylvania American Water, and McCandless Township Water Authority. The Health Department is also assisting Indiana Borough Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility with its wastewater surveillance program.

The utilities collect 24-hour composite wastewater samples two to three times per week. Samples are couriered to the county’s Public Health Laboratory in Lawrenceville and prepared for shipment to a commercial laboratory for analysis. Samples are analyzed for copies of the virus per liter and for variants of interest. In mid-2022, the county laboratory expects to begin analyzing samples on site. A team at Carnegie Mellon University’s (CMU) Auton Laboratory provides analytic support to the project, including developing predictive modeling and mapping. The CMU team is developing an internal dashboard for data monitoring and will help prepare public reports. Additional details will be released when available. Data will be shared with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, which will enter them into the CDC wastewater surveillance tracking system.

Samples have been collected since late-October; SARS-CoV2 has been detected in all of them. Omicron began to be detected in small amounts around December 10.

For more information on wastewater surveillance, go to the [CDC’s informational page](#).

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