COVID-19 Questions Received by the Library’s Health Services Division

Updated 1/10/2022

Q: What are the differences between the Delta and Omicron Variants of COVID-19?

A: Global data has shown the Omicron variant to be more contagious but cause a more mild infection. The symptoms seem to be more pronounced in the upper respiratory tract – congestion, runny nose, sore throat and headache. The Omicron variant also appears to be able to evade any immunity generated by a previous infection with COVID-19, like Delta or any of the previous variants. Therefore, a previous infection will not provide protection.

The Delta variant seems to be slightly less contagious, but appears to cause a more serious illness. The Delta variant is more likely to infect the lungs, increasing the risk for pneumonia and the need for hospitalization and ventilator use.

Q: If I am fully vaccinated and received a booster, am I still susceptible to a breakthrough infection?

A: Yes. You can still be infected with COVID-19 if you are vaccinated and boosted. The COVID-19 vaccines are very successful at minimizing serious illness, hospitalizations and death from COVID-19; however, they are not able (nor were they expected) to completely neutralize the chance of infection. The good news is that most people who are vaccinated suffer mild symptoms and recover much quicker than those who are not vaccinated when they are infected.

Vaccination appears to be more effective against the Delta and previous variants than the Omicron variant. The reason for this is that the Omicron variant is able to replicate in the upper respiratory tract (nose, sinuses and throat) much faster than the Delta variant, and therefore the amount of virus increases very quickly. Your immune system, primed by the vaccine, will catch up and start fighting the virus, which limits the spread and resolves the infection within days. Because the Delta variant replicates slower, the antibodies generated by your body that are primed by the vaccine are able to stop the initial infection before it can replicate and cause illness.

Q: If I suffer seasonal allergies (similar to COVID-19 symptoms)- do I still need to contact HSD before reporting for duty?

A: Yes. Since many of the symptoms are the same for seasonal allergies as for a COVID-19 infection, it is difficult to tell what could be causing your current symptoms. Contact HSD and do not come in to work without their clearance. Concurrent issues are also possible. You could be having allergy symptoms AND a COVID-19 infection. Health Services will work with you to ensure you do not miss
work unnecessarily. They may ask you to provide medical documentation supporting a chronic condition.

If you do suffer from seasonal allergies, please ensure that you are treating them and trying to avoid triggers. Common allergy responses (runny nose, itchy eyes) can create an environment that can promote infection from COVID-19.

**Q: What type of mask should I be wearing to protect myself from COVID-19?**

**A:** Everyone should be wearing a well-fitting mask that fits snugly against the face and securely above the nose and below the chin, covering your nose and mouth completely. The mask should fit snugly with no or minimal gaps. The mask should extend under your chin. Gaiters and bandanas generally do not provide a snug fit and are not authorized, particularly for the unvaccinated.

Your mask should have at least three layers (if you can see light through it, it is too thin) and no vents (these just let virus in and out). With the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant, the best protection comes from a KN-95 or KF-94 mask or double masking with a surgical mask under a cloth mask. A close, snug fit is most important.

**Q: Please define “close contact”**.

**A:** A close contact is someone who has been 6 feet or closer for 15 minutes or more throughout a 24 hour period, regardless of mask use or vaccination status, with an individual who has symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19.

**Q: What is the difference between a primary contact and secondary contact?**

**A:** A primary contact is an individual who has had close contact with someone who is symptomatic or tested positive for COVID-19. A secondary contact is an individual who has had contact with another individual who has had contact with someone who is symptomatic or positive for COVID-19.

Example: Your co-worker tests positive for COVID-19. You may be a primary contact. Your family members would be secondary contacts.

**Q: Can an infected person spread COVID-19 before showing symptoms?**

**A:** Yes! Some infected people never show symptoms but are able to pass the infection along. This is why HSD asks who you have been in contact with going back at least 2 days prior to your symptoms starting or your positive test.
Q: What is the difference between pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic cases of COVID-19?

A: Pre-symptomatic is not a term that we use. There is an interval of time between being exposed to COVID-19 and showing symptoms of infection. This can be as short as 2-3 days or as long as 10 days. However, some people do not develop symptoms, which is called asymptomatic. Not having symptoms does not necessarily mean that an individual is not capable of transmitting the virus.

Q: Is it possible to test negative one day, then test positive a few days later?

A: Yes! Rapid tests (lateral flow on the graphic below) taken earlier than 3 days after possible exposure may be negative because there is not enough virus present to trigger a positive test. PCR tests are more sensitive and will likely pick up an infection sooner.

Q: Should staff be wearing gloves?

A: Wearing gloves will not decrease the chance of getting infected with COVID-19, since the virus is passed via respiratory droplets. Fomite transmission (getting an infection from touching something) of COVID-19 has been shown to be fairly minimal. **You cannot get sick from the COVID-19 virus just touching your skin – it must enter through a mucous membrane (eyes, nose, mouth).** You can get sick from touching a surface recently coughed on by someone infected with COVID-
19 and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose. This is true whether you have gloves on or not.

Wearing gloves can give people a false sense of security. You should wash your hands or use hand sanitizer prior to touching your face, whether you have gloves on or not.

Q: Is COVID-19 spread coming from within the Library or from outside sources?

A: The Library has experienced very little spread of COVID-19 within the Library. In almost all recent cases of COVID-19 reported to HSD, employees have contracted the virus in their own homes from family members or during social events or traveling. There have been cases (we estimate 2-3) where a Library employee transmitted COVID-19 to another Library employee. There have not been any documented cases of a visitor (tourist or researcher) transmitting COVID-19 to an employee while on-site.

Q: How can I best protect myself, my family, and my co-workers?

A: A layered defense of vaccination, distancing, masking, and hand hygiene is the best way to protect yourself and those around you. These recommendations are equally applicable at work and in your personal and social situations:

- Do not come to work or engage in social events if you are sick. Report symptoms to Health Services!
- If you are not vaccinated, please consider getting vaccinated.
- If you have not yet received a booster shot, make an appointment to get your booster shot. Studies have shown in can increase your protection from 30% with the initial series to 70% or greater with the booster.
- Keep your distance from those outside your household. This includes vaccinated and unvaccinated people. This is especially important when engaging in activities like eating and drinking when you may not be masked.
- Wear a well-fitting, snug mask with no vents. Gaiters and bandanas do not provide a good enough fit for indoor use. During this Omicron surge, KN95 or KF95 masks provide the best protection, but double masking with a surgical mask and a cloth mask will also increase your protection.
- Wash/sanitize your hands frequently. This will help avoid transmitting the virus by touching your eyes, nose or mouth.