News Release

Unified Government of Wyandotte County

701 N. 7th Street, Room 620
Kansas City, Kansas 66101

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   December 20, 2021

COVID-19 Omicron Variant Confirmed in Wyandotte County, KS

Today, the Unified Government Public Health Department (UGPHD) announced that the first confirmed cases of the Omicron COVID-19 variant have been detected in Wyandotte County.

Two Omicron cases in people living in Wyandotte County were confirmed through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) lab over the weekend. KDHE's Laboratories are screening positive COVID-19 samples to check for genetic characteristics associated with the Omicron variant and sequencing samples to confirm if they are Omicron. The individuals in Wyandotte County with confirmed cases of the Omicron variant are both adults between 20 and 39 years of age. Both of these individuals are fully vaccinated with two doses of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna).

What Individuals Can do to Protect Themselves

"With new COVID variants like Omicron, is more important than ever that we each take steps to protect ourselves and others from COVID," said Juliann Van Liew, Director of the UGPHD. "Vaccinations are still the best protection against serious illness and hospitalization from COVID, and boosters are especially important to help protect against Omicron. We also strongly encourage people to wear masks in public indoor spaces and continue social distancing. If you will be gathering or traveling for the holidays, we recommend testing before doing so, especially for those who are unvaccinated or are experiencing any symptoms."

Here are some tips for what individuals can do to protect themselves and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community:

- **Get vaccinated.** Vaccines are still the most effective way to protect people from COVID-19 illness, reduce the spread of disease, and reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalizations, and death, and are expected to help protect against these serious outcomes with the Omicron variant.
  - COVID-19 vaccines are available for people ages 5 and over.
  - Find a vaccine provider near you at vaccines.gov.
- **Get a booster** when you are eligible. Immunity from COVID-19 vaccines wanes over time, and boosters help bring that immunity back up. Based on data available so far on Omicron, boosters appear to be especially important in protecting against this variant.

- o People ages 16 and older are eligible for a COVID-19 booster when they are six months out from their second dose of Pfizer or Moderna, or two months out from a dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
  - o Find a vaccine provider near you at vaccines.gov.
- **Wear a mask.** Masks help reduce the spread of all variants of the virus. KDHE recommends that, "people wear a well-fitting mask in public indoor settings in Kansas, where COVID-19 transmission remains high, regardless of vaccination status."
- **Get tested.** COVID-19 testing is still an important way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and help you take care of your own health and the health of those around you. **Please get tested if:**
  - o **You are sick.** Remember that COVID-19 symptoms can resemble flu, cold, or allergy symptoms, so it is best to get tested if you have any of these symptoms.
  - o **You have been exposed to COVID-19**, meaning you were in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 (get tested about five days after exposure to COVID-19)
  - o **You will be traveling** soon or have recently returned from traveling. Testing is especially important before/after travel if you are not vaccinated.
  - o **You will be attending a large gathering/event**, or have recently attended a large gathering/event. Testing is especially important before and after gatherings if you are not vaccinated.

  Go to bit.ly/WyCoCOVIDtest or go to KnowBeforeYouGoKS.com to find a free testing location near you. At-home tests are also available for purchase at some grocery stores and pharmacies. If you get a positive result through an at-home test, follow up with a health care provider about a confirmation test.

- **Socially distance.** When in public settings, stay at least 6 feet from other people who do not live in your household, especially if you are at higher risk of getting sick, or you have people in your life who are at high risk.

COVID-19 Data in Wyandotte County
- The average number of new COVID-19 cases per day (of any virus variant) in Wyandotte County is 82 cases per day, which is four times higher than it was at the end of October.
- The percent positivity of COVID-19 test in Wyandotte County is at about 33%, more than twice the level at the end of October.
- Among new COVID-19 cases in Wyandotte County in the past two weeks, about one third were among children and teens ages 0-19, and about one third were among people in their 20s and 30s.

COVID-19 vaccine and booster locations
The UGPHD provides COVID-19 vaccines for people ages 5 and older, and boosters for eligible individuals ages 16 and older, at the Kmart site, 7836 State Ave, Kansas City, KS:

- Holiday hours December 20 – December 29: Monday – Wednesday, 10:00am – 6:00pm
- January hours: Fridays, 12:00 – 6:00pm
- COVID-19 Testing hours at Kmart: December 20 – December 29: Monday – Wednesday 9;00 am – 3:00 p.m. For more hours and locations visit bit.ly/WyCoCOVIDtest

The UGPHD also offers COVID-19 vaccines for people ages 12 and older, including boosters for eligible people ages 16 and older, at the UGPHD building at 619 Ann Ave in Kansas City, KS, by appointment only. Call 913-573-8855 to make an appointment.

Additional vaccination sites can be found at vaccines.gov. Find more information on COVID-19 vaccines in Wyandotte County at WycoVaccines.org.

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Community Information and Questions:
          Vaccine information: Go to WycoVaccines.org or call 3-1-1 (913-573-5311)
          Other COVID-19 updates: Go to wycokck.org/COVID-19

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