

**Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer**

February 9, 2022

Dear Community,

According to Punxsutawney Phil, there are only five more weeks of winter. Warmer days are ahead of us and Howard County is now on the other side of the Omicron surge. We peaked about a month ago with a case rate of 189 daily new cases per 100,000 and a test positivity rate of 28%. Last month, hospitalizations dramatically increased requiring Howard County General Hospital to implement crisis standards of care. In addition, deaths related to COVID were among the highest in the past two years. Today's metrics are improved with 27 daily new cases per 100,000, 6% test positivity rate and declining hospitalizations. Although these numbers are improving, per CDC guidelines, these metrics indicate Howard County remains a community with high levels of transmission.

When [community transmission remains high](#) or substantial, (>7 daily new cases per 100,000 or >50 total new cases per 100,000 in the past 7 days), masking remains an effective mitigation strategy when indoors, especially when physical distancing is not possible, and outbreaks exist. Schools should continue masking policies until community transmission levels decrease to moderate/low levels, (<7 daily new cases per 100,000 or <50 total new cases per 100,000 in the past 7 days). I am optimistic that our metrics will continue to decline over the next several weeks, allowing for the relaxation of masking policies.

Vaccination efforts continue among residents, especially among 5 -11-year-old children and those eligible for boosters. The Omicron surge showed us the importance of boosters in preventing hospitalizations and deaths. Unfortunately, 33% of eligible adults have not received their booster. Vaccination remains our best defense against COVID-19 and I urge everyone to complete their vaccination series, including getting a booster. Vaccine is widely available in pharmacies, retail supermarkets, provider offices and HCHD. Currently, 95% of residents 12 and older have completed their primary series, and 66% of children 5 -11 have received at least one dose. Pfizer has submitted data to the FDA for emergency use authorization of vaccine for children ages 6 months – 4 years. The data review may take a few weeks. In the meantime, planning is underway with community pediatricians to establish clinics for our youngest residents once vaccine is authorized. Go to [howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19](http://howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19) for information on testing and vaccine sites.

Over time, and with every new surge and variant, we learn more about this virus. The health department continues to monitor emerging data and carefully reviews federal/state guidance to provide recommendations to our community for COVID-19 prevention.

Thank you for doing your part to help us control the spread of COVID-19. Please remember:

- **Get vaccinated** as soon as you can and get a **Booster** when eligible.
- **Mask** if you are indoors in public places, around those whose vaccine status you don't know.
- **Stay home** if you are not feeling well.
- **Test** if you have been exposed or have symptoms.
- **Isolate** if you test positive.
- **Quarantine** if you are identified as a close contact [following CDC guidelines](#).
- **Take care** of yourself, so you can take care of others.



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