

COVID Update January 26, 2020

IN SC: Case numbers have shown a slight decline recently, but the Omicron variant surge continues in SC. The seven-day rolling average daily case number as reported by Johns Hopkins for the entire state, which was 7 cases per 100k population the last week in November, is now 246, which places us 11th in the country but is a 24% decrease from the week before. Deaths increased 17% and hospitalizations rose 2%. In fact, hospitalizations are the highest ever in the pandemic, at 300-350 daily, and 35-40 daily deaths statewide. The entire state remains at the 'high' transmission level, and Greenville is one of the highest with 4,826 cases per 100k population as of Wednesday (greater than 200 is considered high.) The Omicron variant is now estimated to account for 99% of cases in the state. On Friday, SC DHEC reported 13,898 new cases of COVID-19 and 55 deaths, the most deaths reported in the last two weeks. On Thursday Jan 20, the state saw a record-high number of children hospitalized for COVID-19 with 61 children being treated. The number of hospitalized children decreased to 56 on Friday. All but one was unvaccinated of the 56 hospitalized children, although 30 of those children are under the age of 5 and therefore ineligible for the vaccine. Almost 45% of children who are eligible remain unvaccinated in S.C. Although breakthrough cases in the fully vaccinated have increased with Omicron, in S.C. only 1.42% of fully vaccinated become infected, only 0.082% are hospitalized, and only 0.023 die. This death rate from COVID is now lower than that from season flu.

NATIONALLY: U.S. Cases fell 14% in the past week, and hospitalizations fell 3% but deaths rose 8%.

On Friday the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report presented data showing that, before vaccines were available, risk of hospitalization with COVID was 1 in 5-10 and risk of death was 1 in 50. In the fully vaccinated (not necessarily boosted), the risk of hospitalization is only 1 in 10,000 and risk of death is 1 in 30,000.

Results of a large study comparing the efficacy of two vs. three vaccine shots against Omicron was published Friday in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Being boosted (having the third shot) was 90% effective at preventing hospitalizations during a period in December and January when Omicron was the dominant variant. The study looked at nearly 88,000 hospitalizations across 10 states. However, having two shots was only 57% effective when it had been at least six months past the second shot. Reviewing more than 200,000 outpatient visits, the study found that being boosted was 82% effective at preventing visits to emergency rooms and urgent care centers. In comparison, getting two shots was only 38% effective at preventing those visits when it had been at least six months past the second shot.

On Tuesday Jan 18, the U.S. launched its website where every American household can obtain 4 free COVID rapid tests per month ([covidtests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov)), which will be shipped in late January. It was also announced that 400 million N95 masks will be shipped to pharmacies for free distribution to the public.

On Saturday, Arkansas reported the highest number of COVID-19 hospitalizations ever at 1,659. It was the fifth day in a row the state set a record. 54% of Arkansas residents age 5 and older are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

North Carolina hospitals are also treating a record number of coronavirus patients, so state health officials are asking FEMA for staffing support in the Charlotte area, including additional nurses, Gov. Roy Cooper said in a statement. To stretch capacity, Atrium Health said it has redeployed staff from urgent care and outpatient centers, limited non-urgent procedures and closed specialty centers – but it's still above 95% capacity.

In California a new bill would allow children 12 and older to be vaccinated without their parents' consent. If passed, it will give California the youngest age of any state where children can make their own decisions about vaccines. It currently allows children ages 12 and older to, without parental consent, get the human papillomavirus and hepatitis B vaccines, along with treatment of sexually transmitted infections and other medical care. Washington, D.C., allows children ages 11 and older to be vaccinated without approval from parents.

As of Saturday, non-U.S. citizens need to be fully vaccinated before entering the country by land or ferry, even if they are traveling for "essential" purposes. Unvaccinated U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents and U.S. nationals still will be able to enter the country via ferry or land port. These changes were announced in October but just became effective.

Nearly 500 inmates at a federal prison in Mississippi have tested positive for COVID-19, currently the highest number of inmate cases among federal prisons nationwide, according to the Bureau of Prisons. The medium-security prison has a population of 1,425

WHAT'S AHEAD?: In welcome news on Thursday Jan 20, a new model from the University of Washington predicts a peak in daily new infections within a few days, followed by a decline as steep as the ascent over the past six weeks. Daily deaths, now averaging about 1,700, also should decline rapidly under the institute's model.

On Sunday, Dr. Anthony Fauci, on ABC's "This Week," said that several states in the Northeast and upper Midwest have seen cases peak and begin to decline sharply but that cases were still rising in the South and West. He said he is "as confident as you can be" that most states will have reached a peak of omicron COVID-19 cases by mid-February.

Schools across the country continue to struggle with in-person classes due to staffing shortages due to COVID.

WORLDWIDE: The WHO reported that the number of new coronavirus cases globally rose by 20% last week to more than 18 million. That is actually a slow-down in the surge because confirmed COVID-19 cases jumped by about 50% the week prior. However, for this past month the WHO reported the biggest single-week increase in cases of the pandemic.

A new large study in Israel found no increased risk of stroke, heart attack, or pulmonary embolism in the weeks following administration of the Pfizer vaccine in people over age 65. The same safety was documented in similar studies previously in the U.S and in France.

Plans for the upcoming Winter Olympics in China are going forward, with increased testing, restrictions and limits on attendance. People in a Beijing district with some 2 million residents were ordered Sunday to undergo mass coronavirus testing following a series of infections. The government instructed residents thought to be at high risk for infection not to leave the city after 25 cases were found in the Fengtai district and 14 elsewhere. The ruling Communist Party has ramped up enforcement of its "zero-tolerance" strategy aimed at isolating every infected person. Every Olympic participant must be either fully vaccinated or having quarantined for 21 days after entering the country. They must show proof of two negative tests before leaving for China, one within 96 hours of departure and another within 72. Everyone will undergo daily testing. NBC Sports on Wednesday announced that it is not sending any of its announcing teams to Beijing. They will work out of NBC Sports headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, instead.