

COVID Update March 22, 2022

IN SC: SC DHEC continues to report rapidly declining cases in SC, which are now only reported weekly on Tuesdays. Today for Greenville County the seven day rolling case count per 100k population as reported for the period ending March 19 is down to 17.9, and for Anderson County it is 10.8 (less than 10 is 'low'). Johns Hopkins data show the state at very low levels as well, 3.8 cases, which is the sixth lowest in the country. The CDC data tracker, which uses case rates as well as COVID hospitalizations and inpatient bed occupancy, shows the entire state to be at 'low' risk level.

In the US: 973,000 people have now died of COVID, and there are still 1,000 daily deaths which is down 14% from the previous week.

Vaccine update – The CDC continues to recommend that everyone over age 5 be vaccinated, and that those over age 12 should also be boosted. Last week Pfizer applied to the FDA for authorization of a fourth vaccine booster dose for those over age 65, and Moderna likewise applied for authorization for a fourth dose, in all adults over age 18. Moderna has also applied for FDA authorization of its vaccine in children down to 6 months. In the Phase 3 study that took place during the omicron wave, researchers found the vaccine was 43.7% effective in children 6 months to 2 years, and 37.5% in kids 2 to 6 years. Cases of COVID-19 in the vaccinated group were mild and no severe disease, hospitalization or death were reported.

Mask guidelines – The CDC recommends that even in areas of low incidence of COVID, severely immunocompromised individuals and those at high risk of severe disease, as well as the unvaccinated, continue to wear a high-quality mask when in large groups indoors. Those with immune suppression should also speak with their physicians about the possibility of receiving the Evushield monoclonal antibody injection, which confers protection against COVID for six months even in those unable to mount an immune response.

BA.2 surge – The UK and Europe are experiencing surges in the BA.2 Omicron variant, which is quickly replacing the original BA.1 Omicron variant in the U.S. This variant is 80% more contagious than the original but causes severe illness and hospitalization at about the same rate. With the recent surge in Omicron in the US, that peaked in January, many people now have native immunity as a result of having had BA.1. The high recent infection rate, along with vaccination, places estimates of immunity in the US at about 75%, so it is hoped there will not be another surge of the BA.2 variant. The US has typically followed Europe in surges by a few weeks to a month. There is no reported BA.2 in South Carolina as yet, but it makes up over half of cases in some northeastern and midwestern communities, and its incidence is doubling every week to a current level of 35% of US COVID cases.