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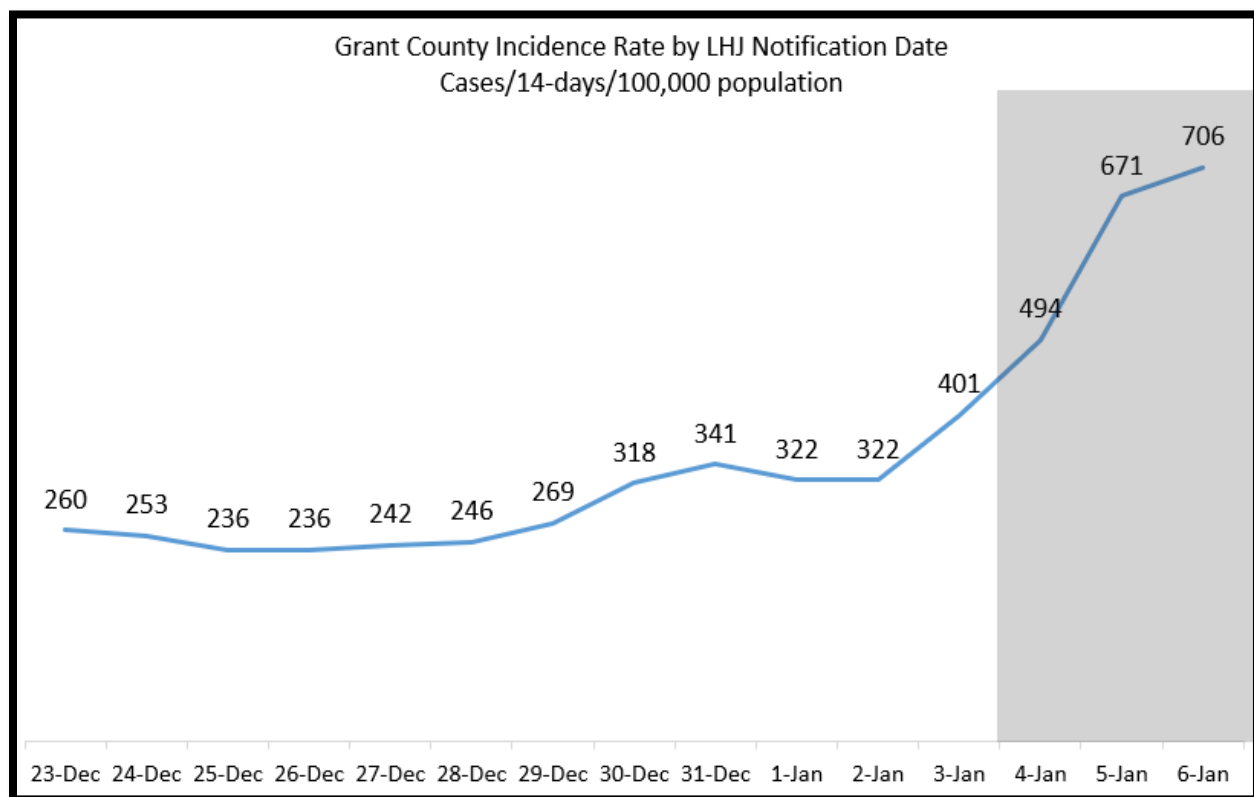
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Omicron Variant of COVID-19 Confirmed in Grant County Healthcare System Stretched

Grant County, WA –The Omicron variant of COVID-19 has been confirmed in Grant County. The Omicron variant is a variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. It was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) from South Africa on November 24, 2021 and has since spread rapidly.

The Omicron variant has been responsible for the majority of cases in the US during this winter and detections have been increasing in Washington over the last month, including confirmed presence in neighboring counties. “The confirmation supports our suspicion that many cases in Grant County have been Omicron for several weeks, given the rapidly rising incidence rate and COVID test positivity, and the frequency and widespread presence of clusters and outbreaks”, said Dr. Alexander Brzezny, Grant County Health Officer.

COVID-19 incidence in Grant County has been rising rapidly from 260 just 2 weeks ago to now 706, placing strain on healthcare system.



COVID-19 tests detect infections of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, including infections from variants of the virus, but to determine which variant is causing the infection, specimens must be sent to a laboratory for genomic sequencing. Not all specimens are submitted for sequencing so the number of omicron cases in Grant County and Washington state is likely much higher.

“The confirmed presence of the omicron variant highlights the importance of continuing measures we’ve been taking to keep ourselves and our loved ones healthy: get vaccinated and, if eligible, get a booster, wear face coverings, avoid crowded indoor settings, increase ventilation when gathering indoors, and stay home if you test positive or don’t feel well”, said Theresa Adkinson, Grant County Health District Administrator.

If you test positive for COVID-19 either at a healthcare facility or using a home test kit:

- Stay home for a minimum of five (5) days if your symptoms are improving, or longer until your symptoms are better, and
- Wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days;
- Consider testing on day 5 (antigen test preferred) to verify that you are no longer infectious.
- Let people who you may have exposed to the virus know.

If you are exposed to COVID-19:

- People who are not fully vaccinated or are more than six months from their original mRNA vaccine dose or more than two months after the J&J vaccine and not yet boosted, stay home for five days and then wear a well-fitting mask for another five days.
- People who have received a booster COVID-19 vaccine do not need to quarantine but should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after exposure.
- Testing is strongly recommended on day five, even if you don’t have any symptoms.
- If symptoms do occur after exposure, individuals should immediately quarantine and test for COVID-19.

Schools must follow school specific requirements which can be found on the Department of Health website: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/ResourcesandRecommendations#schools>

Anyone who is 12 or older and was previously vaccinated can get a booster dose once five months have passed since their last dose of Pfizer, six months have passed since their last dose of Moderna vaccine, or two months have passed since they received a dose of the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine. People over 50 and those with significant underlying health conditions are especially encouraged to get a booster.

Vaccination remains our top protection against omicron and all variants of COVID-19. A timely booster dose maximizes protection against both infection and serious illness. Vaccines are widely available in the county from healthcare providers, pharmacies, and Grant County Health District vaccine clinics.

Local hospitals and urgent cares are reporting an increase in people coming into emergency departments only for COVID-19 testing. To help our healthcare maintain their focus on medical emergencies and urgencies, most COVID-19 testing, including testing for travel, return to work or school, and other activities should be done at specific testing sites or your primary care doctor.

For a list of testing locations see the Department of Health website:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/TestingforCOVID19/TestingLocations>.

If you experience any of the following, you should **seek immediate medical care**:

- Shortness of breath even while resting,
- Consistent pain or pressure in the chest
- Confusion or dizziness
- Lips or face dryness along with turning blue

As of today, just over 15,300 Grant County residents had received a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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