

**Governor Scott:**

White house updates:

- ½ billion at home tests will be made available
- Boosters and vaccines are most effective
- Pfizer and Merck antivirals will be available soon

Reflecting on how far we've come: vaccines have prevented 1000 deaths, could not travel into VT without quarantine, could not see family, many businesses closed, many schools not full time  
Still have lowest death and hospital rate, businesses open, kids back in school, only 3000 collecting unemployment – more jobs open than we can fill, can see family and travel

But do see challenges on the horizon between holiday gatherings and Omicron; will see more breakthrough cases; now is the time to get your booster

Down almost 40% from our peak of hospitalizations; booster, wearing mask indoors, testing will be critical as Omicron continues to spread

Rule of 3 for gatherings: do at least 2 of the 3: wear mask, be fully vaccinated, test ahead of time

Same applies to employers: vaccine or negative test; mask

**Commissioner Pieciak, DFR Modeling update**

[https://dfr.vermont.gov/sites/finreg/files/doc\\_library/dfr-covid19-modeling-122121.pdf](https://dfr.vermont.gov/sites/finreg/files/doc_library/dfr-covid19-modeling-122121.pdf)

Omicron is now dominant variant in the U.S. – took 4 weeks to arrive and become over 70%; took Delta 8 weeks – shows how quickly it is spreading

Still see some regional difference – already 93% of NY&NJ; New England is still lower at only 37.7% but inevitable it will get there

40% increase across region last week – highest number of cases since the beginning of the pandemic – up 92% in Quebec, 70% in NY

VT: Cases have stayed steady, down 1.3% 7 days; down 16% over last 14 days – about steady state since Thanksgiving, still high at about 400 cases/week

Hospitalizations and ICU are down over last 7 days; still about 73% unvaccinated

More open beds/capacity since Sept – good news heading into the holidays

Data shows significant protection among fully vaccinated and boosted for hospitalization and deaths – not fully vaccinated 30x more likely to die, 46x more likely to be hospitalized

Models do show cases increasing – could reach as high as 1000 per week with variants and holidays – shows importance of continued mitigation measures like masking and boosting

**Sec. Kurrle, Agency of Commerce and Community Development**

Want to offer recommendations for best practices and safety for VT employers – and eliminate need for quarantine for employees who are close contact

New best practices webinar: <https://accd.vermont.gov/content/mitigating-and-responding-covid-19-workplace>

These are not mandates, not one-size-fit-all – but to keep everyone healthy and hospital capacity

Accd.vermont.gov: webinar and memo for best practices

Show proof of vaccination and booster

If not vaccinated, require proof of negative weekly tests and always masking

Some businesses should require proof of vaccination or negative test policy – like restaurants and bars – can increase vaccination rates and peace of mind

**Dan French, DOE**

No contact tracing over the holidays

Recommending large testing clinics and school testing as kids come back after the holidays

Continue to make progress in 5-11; boosters in age 16-17

Test to stay is going very well – last week, schools did 26,000 tests

CDC announced endorsement of test to stay

Analyzing Omicron and school mitigation strategies: masking, testing, vaccination, school operations

Reviewing testing and contact tracing policies – more information in the coming weeks

Mask wearing will remain important – most likely continue masking past Jan 18

Workforce and staffing impacts with Omicron – developing recommendations

**Sec Smith, AHS**

As of today, 92% have received at least 1 dose of vaccine

53% of ages 5-11 have received a dose or scheduled

Pleased to see hospital beds increasing

30 FEMA hospital staff have now arrived in VT – at UVMMC (20) and SVMC (10)

16 FEMA and EMS teams have now arrived to deliver monoclonal antibodies – will help with a spike after the holidays

Additional vaccine clinics are available over the holiday season

Special state testing sites will be open over the holidays since some sites will be closed – LAMP tests and antigen tests will be available on Dec 23 and 30 b/c labs won't be processing next day

Review of safe holiday gathering measures

**Mark Levine, MD, VDH**

Omicron is here and likely has been for several weeks

Can take 10 days to 2 weeks to get the sequencing results

First case confirmed in VT this weekend, and 3 more cases confirmed with more likely to be confirmed very shortly

What really counts is the steps we are taking to mitigate: it is very contagious so we are likely to see more cases, illness may be less severe but greater number of cases may mean strain on our health care system

You do need to have your booster shot to be protected

UK shows that protection from infection increased to 76% after getting a booster and they will help protect you from hospitalization

If someone says the vaccines don't work, that is not true, they do prevent against the worst outcomes

Make your holiday plans so that the most vulnerable will still be protected: use masks appropriately indoors; get tested before and after; keep gathering small; get vaccinated/boosted

Case dashboard has some changes coming: to include rate of cases, hospitalization, deaths in vaccinated vs unvaccinated – coming tomorrow

Vermonters who are higher risk: there are treatments available, including monoclonal antibodies for those over 65 or with high risk conditions – reach out to your health care provider as soon as you get a positive result

Monoclonal antibodies do not seem to be as effective against Omicron – but a new option is available that is most effective – starting with smaller quantities – starting only with those with Omicron or in communities with high Omicron spread

Long acting injectable antibody also available for those who are immunocompromised or doesn't expect a immune response – can be used to prevent COVID infection – very small quantity right now

### Questions and Answers

Q: last week, gov mentioned 5% unvaccinated but dashboard doesn't look that high – how do numbers compare? Scott: 5% is just adult population does not include 5-11

Q: how long will FEMA teams be here? Scott: a few weeks commitment now; we will see if our rates continue to stabilize and will keep reassessing

Q: Biden administration working on distributing at-home tests – how confident are you in current supply of LAMP tests, PCR tests and antigen tests through the holidays? Scott: I think we're ok; Mike Smith, think we have enough capacity through the holidays, would eventually like to transition from PCR to more rapid results tests like LAMP, antigen; if a testing site looks full, keep checking because they keep adding slots; also can walk in for an antigen test on Dec 23 or 30 b/c those are days state tests won't be run

Q: what is VT fully protected population w. booster? Pieciak: 216,000 out of full VT population

Q: can't find antigen test at any pharmacy in Central VT – should they walk in to state site? Smith: yes, could do that on Dec 23 or 30 only

Q: what is time for quarantine for fully vaccinated who get Omicron? Has seen a lot saying shorter than 10 days. Levine: you will see more people fully vaccinated who get Omicron; right now no new policy – under active discussion at CDC and state now

Q: are we really prepared for an Omicron “storm” with 1000 cases/day? Scott: it really depends on the severity of the “storm” and whether it puts people in the hospital

Q: should someone with J&J get a 3<sup>rd</sup> booster? Levine: we know if you have one dose J&J and one dose booster level Moderna you should be fine without doing full series, but that is still under review to see what happens several months out; if someone got 2 J&J doses should they get an mRNA? Levine: that would be reasonable, your booster levels pale if you haven't had an mRNA

Q: Older variants – where did they go? Levine: you are seeing natural selection and evolution right before your eyes, Brazil, UK variants – didn't really take a foothold and got outcompeted.

Q: Holiday testing sites on 23<sup>rd</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> – how many tests have we set aside? – Smith: 10,000 lamp tests – up to 50,000 antigen rapid tests

Q: Calling around to pharmacies and turning people away for tests as no supply – surprised to hear administration say ample supply. Smith – need to plan ahead. White House says they will be readily available, but the state has been planning for months to get supply chain and building up for holidays. After holidays will be moving to rapid tests and away from PCR/24 hour result.

Q: Why are we still using guidelines of 2 vaccines and not booster since we see the benefit, why not build in 3 shot (include booster)? Scott: we are building to that. Good point as you are not fully protected unless you have your booster. Waiting for guidance from CDC as well.

Q: Strategies that are upcoming for convincing unvaccinated to get vaccinated? And what have we learned from those recently vaccinated? Scott/Levine: requirements from businesses to be vaccinated

may be powerful (bars in 21 and over - example), keep your job, get in to a venue, etc.. Lots going on in courts, but most people stay at their jobs and get vaccinated.

Q: Fully vaccinated/fully vaccinated still catch virus and spread? Levine: more than any variant before, this variant has the capability to infect the fully vaccinated and boosted – most have mild illness and not get really sick. Will have capability of spreading, but if like Delta, short window to actively transmit if vaccinated. They could potentially be walking around asymptomatic and spreading – but hopefully they are wearing a mask to help mitigate that happening.

Q: Given enormous emphasis on vaccination could you tell us if you would consider a vaccine mandate in order to use your position as Gov. to protect the public? Scott: would take a state of emergency to force people to get vaccinated. My style is carrots rather than sticks encouraging – certain population who is not going to do it and will resist – will create a lot of controversy. Get your point, but VT has done really well and we are not there yet and we have done well with the approach we have taken to get people to get 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> doses.