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**NEWS
RELEASE**

01/03/2022

El Paso Reports First Confirmed Cases of Omicron Variant

Omicron Cases May Be Eligible for Infusion Treatment

EL PASO, Texas – The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH) received confirmation of its first twelve (12) cases that tested positive for the COVID-19 Omicron variant.

The specimens were collected and shipped for testing on December 21 and 22, 2021. It is the first time the variant has been identified in the community.

The patients are between the age ranges of 20s to 70s. They include six males and six females. Three reported having traveled outside of El Paso. Seven were fully vaccinated and none required hospitalization. Three individuals are still active cases; seven have recovered; and two were nonresponsive to outreach by the City’s contact tracers.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Omicron variant:

- Likely to be more transmissible than original SARS-CoV-2
- Likely that vaccinated people with breakthrough infection or people infected without symptoms can spread the virus to others
- More data are needed to know if Omicron infections cause more severe illness or death than infection with other variants
- Vaccines expected to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths
- Breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated likely to occur
- Still determining how well existing treatments for COVID-19 work

As of now, the impact of Omicron is not fully known, but the community is urged to reduce COVID-19 transmission by getting vaccinated or boosted, wearing masks indoors and at large outdoor events, and by getting tested when feeling sick or if exposed to COVID-19.

Vaccines are expected to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. The City offers vaccine clinics six days a week at various locations throughout the community. To schedule a vaccine visit [EPCovidVaccine.com](https://www.elpasotexas.gov/epcovidvaccine).

Many symptoms of COVID-19 resemble those of a cold, flu and allergies. Anyone experiencing congestion or a runny nose, the sniffles, sore throat, fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea should be tested for COVID-19. Free testing is available at City-run sites; people also may contact their healthcare provider or area pharmacies to receive a test.

COVID-19 INFUSION THERAPY AT THE REGIONAL INFUSION CENTER AVAILABLE

Patients who test positive may be eligible to receive the COVID-19 Infusion Therapy at the Regional Infusion Center (RIC), located at 9341 Alameda. The RIC, located at 9341 Alameda, is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Sunday.

Patients can call the Texas Infusion Hotline for General Information and Assistance at 1-800-742-5990 to ensure they meet the criteria and schedule their appointment. Walk-ins will be seen but individuals are strongly encouraged to make an appointment to avoid long wait times. Providers are on site to evaluate patients and confirm eligibility.

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Media Contact: Laura Cruz Acosta
Strategic Communications Director
Cruz-AcostaLA@elpasotexas.gov
(915) 212.1071



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The RIC, which was stood up by the City in partnership with the State of Texas Department of State Health Services, offers therapy to minimize the risk of hospitalization due to COVID-19. The treatment is particularly helpful to high-risk individuals who have been exposed and are not vaccinated.

The treatment is used in patients who are COVID-19 positive and meet the following criteria:

- Non-hospitalized adults and adolescents 12 years of age and older
- Mild to moderate symptoms
- Within 10 days of symptom onset
- No current need for supplemental oxygen

Medical providers referring their patients to the RIC for treatment may continue to do so through the provider exclusive online portal at www.stateoftexasinfusionhotline.com.

Health officials remind the public to continue wearing face covers, wash your hands frequently and watch your distancing, regardless of whether you have or have not yet received the vaccine. Additional information about COVID-19, including COVID-19 testing can be found at EPStrong.org.

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