



CORONAVIRUS BRIEFING: DECEMBER 23, 2021

THE CENTRAL COMMUNICATIONS BRIEFING FOR THE TOWN OF WELLESLEY

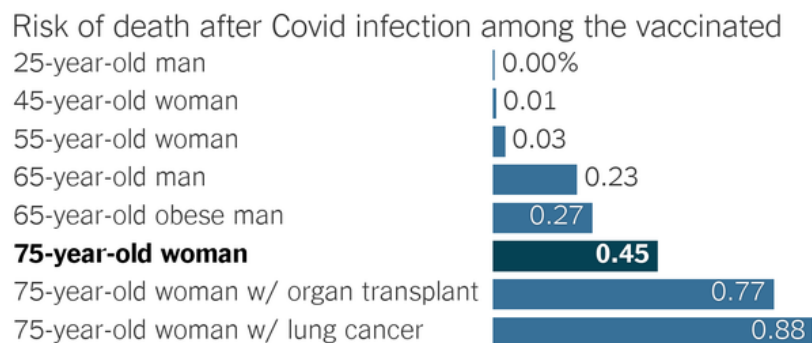
Boosters, Masks, and Common Sense



Wellesley is seeing a large spike in COVID-19 infections both in the community and in our schools. Health Department statistics show an average of 19 cases/day, much more than the 3-4 case/day averages reported before Thanksgiving. This week alone, Wellesley Public Schools reported 30 new confirmed COVID cases over a 3-day period.

The majority of these cases are likely the COVID-19 Omicron variant, which is highly infectious and highly transmissible, and 98% of these cases have resulted from household spread. Health officials know the daily case numbers will continue to rise in the coming days especially as families gather for the holidays. Wellesley-specific COVID-19 health data is updated every Friday on the COVID-19 Information Hub www.wellesley.ma.gov/coronavirus

Fortunately, Wellesley has a high vaccination rate overall. Currently 86% of individuals have received one or more vaccine doses according to the State's [municipal vaccination report](#), and actual numbers are even higher due to college students who were vaccinated outside of Massachusetts. It is important to remember that being vaccinated does not prevent you from contracting the virus and testing positive, however **being vaccinated greatly reduces your chance of becoming severely ill or dying from COVID-19**, as shown in the chart below.*



*Source: The New York Times, December 23, 2021.

Health officials expect that the majority of individuals in Wellesley will likely contract COVID-19 at some point. Older people or those with underlying health issues are more at risk to become moderately or severely ill; the risk for healthy individuals is much less. The risk of severe illness or death is highest for anyone not vaccinated.

With the upcoming Christmas and New Year holidays, Health Department officials strongly urge residents, visitors, businesses and their employees to take steps to reduce exposure to the virus.

- **Get your vaccines and boosters!** Visit the Massachusetts vaxfinder.com site for locations and availability or book appointments at local pharmacies such as CVS, Walgreens, or Stop & Shop. Check websites frequently! Vaccine appointments are added on a rolling basis and spots open up throughout the day.

- **Wear a tight-fitting mask when indoors in public.** The Health Department has issued a **mask advisory** for all individuals over the age of 5 when indoors in a public setting, regardless of vaccination status. An [emergency order](#) requiring masks when indoors in Wellesley municipal buildings remains in effect.
 - **Check your masks.** To be effective, masks must cover your mouth and nose. Health experts are now [recommending that individuals upgrade to quality face coverings such as surgical masks](#) which block aerosol particles more effectively than cloth face coverings.
 - **Mask advisory signage** for businesses, churches, and other public areas is available on [the Health Department webpages](#).
- **Use common sense.** Consider the risk of COVID-19 infection and transmission when planning holiday activities, attending gatherings or faith services, or traveling, and make decisions based on public health guidance and your own comfort levels.

A reminder that COVID-19 data is updated weekly every Friday on Wellesley's COVID-19 Information Hub at www.wellesleyma.gov/coronavirus

COVID-19 Testing

Health officials recommend COVID-19 tests if you think you may have been exposed to the virus. PCR testing is available at testing sites and local pharmacies. Visit the [Massachusetts COVID-19 testing website](#) for locations. You will likely have to wait in line, so plan accordingly.

At-home test kits are scarce, however local pharmacies are receiving regular shipments so check frequently. At-home kits may also be ordered online through Amazon, Walmart, and other retailers. **Please note:** For at-home testing, officials recommend waiting to test between 3-5 days AFTER you may have been exposed for a more accurate result. **If you receive a positive at-home test, please follow up with a PRC test.**

You Tested Positive for COVID-19, Now What?

The Wellesley Health Department has put together [this guide](#) with information on quarantine and isolation and notifying close contacts. Additional information is available on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) webpages under [COVID-19 and Your Health](#).

“Flu A” Infections on the Rise

Cases of Influenza “A,” a more severe variant of the flu, are also on the rise. Health officials are urging all individuals to get a flu shot if you have not received one. You can get the flu vaccine and COVID-19 vaccine at the same time. Use the [Flu Shot finder website](#) for flu shot locations.

A well-fitting mask can also help prevent flu and cold transmission especially when indoors and in large groups. Continuing to practice good hygiene – washing hands frequently and using hand sanitizer – is also recommended to help reduce the spread of flu, the common cold, and other respiratory infections.

Thank you for helping keep Wellesley healthy. Happy Holidays!