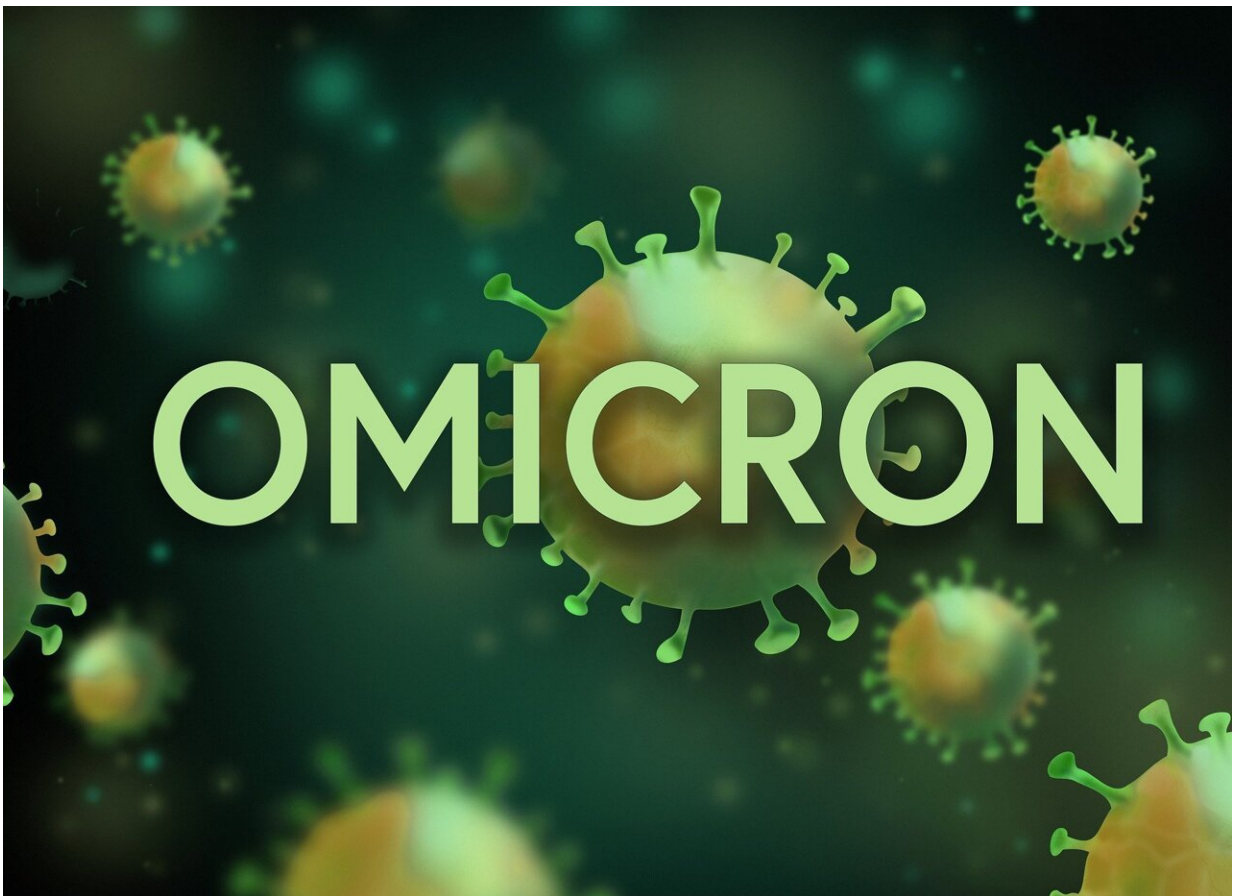


An expert's take on what Omicron tells us about the state of the pandemic

December 15 2021, by Deedee Stiepan



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Researchers at Mayo Clinic and around the world continue to monitor the omicron variant and study how it behaves. Dr. Gregory Poland, head

of Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group, who has decades of experience in the field of infectious diseases, offers some insight into what the emergence of omicron tells us about the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic and where it may be headed.

"We're now touching on just about two years of this, we're now on our fifth [variant](#) of concern. This is going to continue to happen until we can convince the public—and this is stark evidence of it, yet again—that until we wear masks indoors, until we are vaccinated and boosted, this is going to continue to happen," says Dr. Poland.

The virus is doing exactly what experts predicted

The [omicron variant](#) has experts, such as Dr. Poland, concerned because of the number of mutations the virus has made from the original strain. While other variants, such as delta, had between 10 mutations in the Spike protein, [omicron](#) has more than 50 mutations, with 30 or so in the Spike protein.

"This isn't getting better. This is doing exactly what we predicted. This is becoming a virus that is changing substantially from the original Wuhan virus," says Dr. Poland.

A grave prediction

"One out of every 410 Americans has died of this [disease](#)—a disease that we can prevent with a 25-cent mask and a free vaccine. If the current numbers continue, about 32,000 Americans who are alive right now and potentially listening to us will be dead by the end of this year. And there's no reason for that to happen," says Dr. Poland.

"Please wear a mask, please be boosted. Talk to your family and friends.

This isn't about pharmaceutical profit making or anything else. As a physician, I take an oath, and I take it seriously, to try to prevent disease, to tell people, warn people why they need to treat a disease or what they need to do to take steps to prevent a disease. And COVID-19 is no different."

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