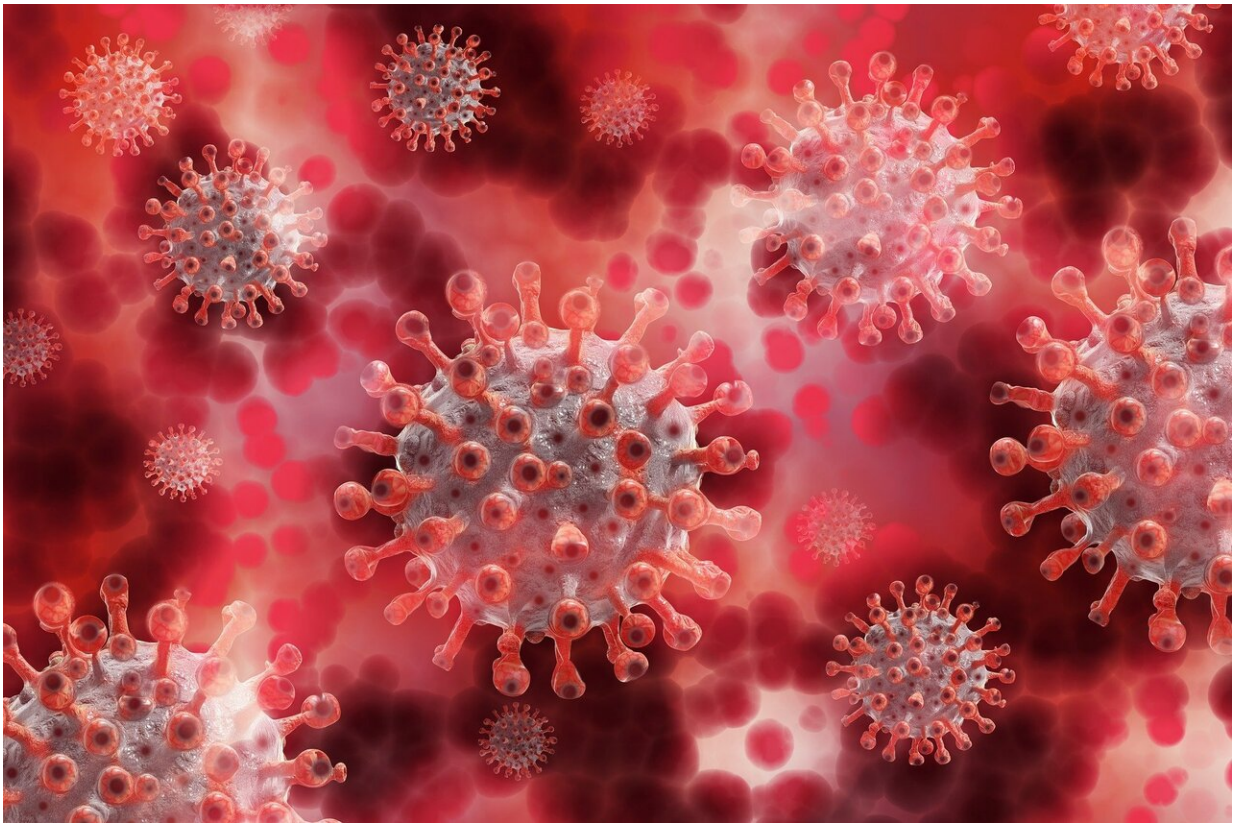


# Experts: Don't let guard down as COVID-19 cases peak

January 28 2022, by Jason Howland

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As the U.S. nears a national peak in the surge of the omicron variant, many states are already seeing a decline in COVID-19 cases. Mayo Clinic's Predictive Analytics Task Force has been tracking COVID-19

cases in the U.S. since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this peak, Mayo experts emphasize that the country is only halfway through the surge.

"I think it's important to recognize the [omicron](#) surge is not over. There are going to be thousands of infections and hospitalizations on the way back down, too," says Dr. Curtis Storlie, a Mayo Clinic data scientist who is on the task force. "So the messaging remains the same. Get boosted if you're eligible. People who've received booster doses of the current vaccine maintain a high level of protection against omicron, particularly against severe illness and hospitalization. Wear a mask in public areas, avoid crowded spaces, get tested if you have symptoms, follow quarantine guidance if you do become infected."

Like many hospitals across the country, Mayo Clinic continues to operate at nearly full capacity. Many of its patients have COVID-19. This has strained staff and resources, and Mayo experts say now is not the time to relax and consider the surge to be over.

"If we take how busy our hospital is now in terms of hospitalized patients with COVID, we may be at or close to a peak. But we've got as many patients in the hospital this week as we did this time last week. So this is not the time for letting our guard down," says Dr. Conor Loftus, chair of Mayo Clinic's outpatient practice.

Both experts agree that the key to ending the COVID-19 pandemic is getting as many people as possible vaccinated.

"Don't wait. Get boosted now. Boosters of the current vaccine are highly effective against omicron. Get another booster this summer when the new more targeted vaccines are available. I can't stress this enough. We're in the driver's seat here as long as we want to drive. If a heavy majority of us take boosting seriously, we could make this the last

substantial COVID surge," says Dr. Storlie.

Mayo Clinic modeling predicts a rapid drop in COVID-19 cases over the next month. The future after that is still uncertain because of the virus' ability to adapt and change.

"We're going to have a sharp decline. And then we're still expecting a calm period of relatively low cases for a few months. However, it's unlikely that it will stay that way. The virus will continue to evolve. For example, we're already seeing news of a new variant — omicron BA.2 — and our immunity is going to wane. We have to take boosting seriously if we want any chance of putting COVID behind us," says Dr. Storlie.

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