

S. Korea sets high of 8,000 new virus cases ahead of holiday

January 25 2022, by Kim Tong-Hyung



A medical worker wearing protective gears disinfects at a temporary screening clinic for the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. South Korea recorded more than 8,000 new coronavirus infections for the first time Tuesday as health authorities reshape the country's pandemic response to address a surge driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man

South Korea recorded more than 8,000 new coronavirus infections for the first time Tuesday as health authorities reshape the country's pandemic response to address a surge driven by the highly contagious omicron variant.

The 8,571 new cases reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency followed three straight days exceeding 7,000. With omicron spreading more than twice as fast as the delta strain that cause the last surge, experts say new cases may exceed 10,000 this week and possibly 20,000 after the Lunar New Year's holiday break that begins this weekend and continues to next Wednesday.

To prevent a sudden explosion of infections from overwhelming hospitals and disrupting workplaces and essential services, South Korea will reduce quarantine periods, expand testing and treat more people at home.

From Wednesday, the quarantine periods for people who test positive after being fully vaccinated will be reduced from the current 10 days to seven days. Fully vaccinated people who comes in close contact with virus carriers won't be placed under quarantine. Officials are also planning to treat a larger number of mild or moderate cases at home and expand the use of rapid antigen tests to detect more infections sooner.

Park Hyang, a senior Health Ministry official, pleaded people to stay home during the upcoming holidays and get vaccinated if they haven't already. While those who aren't fully vaccinated account for less than 7% of South Koreans who are 12 years or older, these people have accounted for about 60% of serious cases and deaths in the past eight weeks, Park said during a briefing.



Health workers wearing protective gears prepare for visitors at a temporary screening clinic for the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. South Korea recorded more than 8,000 new coronavirus infections for the first time Tuesday as health authorities reshape the country's pandemic response to address a surge driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



People queue in line for the coronavirus test while maintaining social distancing at a temporary screening clinic for the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. South Korea recorded more than 8,000 new coronavirus infections for the first time Tuesday as health authorities reshape the country's pandemic response to address a surge driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



People queue in line for the coronavirus test at a temporary screening clinic for the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. South Korea recorded more than 8,000 new coronavirus infections for the first time Tuesday as health authorities reshape the country's pandemic response to address a surge driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



A health worker wearing protective gear holds plastic gloves for visitors at a temporary screening clinic for the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. South Korea recorded more than 8,000 new coronavirus infections for the first time Tuesday as health authorities reshape the country's pandemic response to address a surge driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Lee Jin-man

"While infections are increasing, cases among people in their 60s or older, who are at higher risk of serious illness and death, have so far remained at a low level," Park said. "We believe this is because the rate of people in that age group who received booster shots has now rose to 84.9%."

Omicron has become the dominant variant in many countries and more

easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had COVID-19 previously. But vaccination and booster shots still provide strong protection from serious illness, hospitalization and death.

More than 85% of South Korea's more than 51 million [people](#) have been fully vaccinated. The KDCA said 50.1% of the population have been administered booster shots as of Tuesday afternoon.

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Citation: S. Korea sets high of 8,000 new virus cases ahead of holiday (2022, January 25)
retrieved 2 May 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-korea-high-virus-cases-holiday.html>

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