



COVID-19 Chief Health Officer Update

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Issued to: Clinicians and the Victorian public

COVID-19 Weekly Data

There were 22,281 COVID-19 cases reported in Victoria this week, an increase of 9.5 per cent on the previous week. The average daily number of new cases this week was 3,183, up from 2,914 last week.

The number of active cases in Victoria on Friday was 19,460, up from 18,150 the same time last week.

The seven-day rolling average of patients with COVID in Victorian hospitals is 430, a 22.2 per cent increase when compared to the same time last week. There are currently 483 COVID patients in Victorian hospitals, including 19 COVID patients in intensive care and 0 cleared cases in intensive care.

There are 2 COVID patients on a ventilator. The seven-day rolling average of patients in intensive care in Victorian hospitals is 15.

In the past three months, 3,299 COVID patients were hospitalised in Victoria. 40.5 per cent of those patients had not received their third vaccine dose. 959 (29 per cent) were unvaccinated, 27 had received one dose, 351 had two doses, 787 had received three doses and 1,175 had received four doses.

Of Victorians aged 50 to 64 years, 79.9 per cent have had their third dose and 30.2 per cent have had their recommended fourth dose. Of those aged over 65, 90.8 per cent have had their third dose and 67.3 per cent have had their fourth dose. 70.2 per cent of people aged 16 and over in Victoria have had three doses of COVID vaccine.

A total of 68 COVID related deaths were reported to the Department in the past week. An average of 10 deaths were reported each day in the past week. There has been a 30.5 per cent decrease in the number of COVID related deaths in the past month when compared to the previous month.

In the past three months, there have been 644 COVID-related deaths in Victoria. Of those deaths, 46.3 per cent had not received their third COVID vaccine dose. 252 (39.1 per cent) were unvaccinated, 3 had received one dose, 43 had two doses, 116 had received three doses and 230 had received four doses.

The total number of COVID-related deaths in Victoria since the pandemic began is 5,993. The number of COVID-related deaths recorded in Victoria so far this year is 4,385.

COVID-19 epidemiological summary

COVID-19 cases and hospitalisations in Victoria increased again this week. Current growth is being driven by a mixture of new Omicron subvariants, which are more immune evasive and are responding to waning immunity from past infection and past vaccination.

The mix of subvariants include recombinant strains such as the recently identified XBF (a combination of BA.2.75 and BA.5) as well as existing subvariants BQ.1/BQ.1.1, BA 2.75 and the XBB recombinant.

These subvariants became dominant in clinical genomics and wastewater surveillance after overtaking BA.4 and BA.5 in early November.

There is no evidence these subvariants cause more severe disease or are resistant to oral antiviral treatments.

However, increased numbers overall have contributed to increased hospitalisation rates.

Some 87 per cent of Victorians aged over 12 have had no vaccine nor a COVID diagnosis within the past four months and are therefore more vulnerable to infection and hospitalisation.

Steps to protect yourself and others

Protecting yourself is the best way to protect yourself and the community. If you don't get COVID, you can't spread COVID.

These six steps can help you stay ahead of COVID this spring:

1. **Wear a mask:** a high-quality and well-fitted mask can protect you from the virus
2. **Get your booster dose:** new bivalent vaccines targeting Omicron variants are available at your GP or local pharmacy
3. **Let fresh air in:** open windows and doors when you can, it reduces the spread of the virus
4. **Get tested:** if you have symptoms, take a rapid antigen test
5. **Stay at home:** if you have COVID, you should stay at home for at least 5 days and until you have no symptoms

Talk to your doctor: **if you are at risk of falling very sick, you may be eligible for COVID medicines.**

Advice for cases and contacts

Helpful information is available online for cases and household, social, workplace, education and other contacts.

See the [checklists](#) and recommend them to your patients.

General advice

COVID-19 symptoms include fever, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath and loss or change in sense of smell or taste. If you are experiencing symptoms, wear a fitted face mask when you get tested.

The Department publishes expected wait times at testing sites as well as updated information about locations and hours of operation at [Where to get tested](#).

For more information call the 24-hour Coronavirus Hotline at [1800 675 398](tel:1800675398) or visit [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Victoria](#).

Current advice to clinicians

Clinicians are no longer required to report positive COVID-19 test results. Laboratories continue to be required to report positive COVID-19 PCR results. People who have tested positive using a rapid antigen test (RAT) should [report their result to the Department of Health online](#) or by calling [1800 675 398](tel:1800675398).

COVID-19 testing criteria

Practitioners should test any patients who meet the clinical criteria below:

- Fever OR chills in the absence of an alternative diagnosis that explains the clinical presentation* OR
- Acute respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, or loss or changes in sense of smell or taste)
- **Note:** testing is also recommended for people with new onset of other clinical symptoms consistent with COVID-19** AND who are from the following cohorts: close contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19; those who have returned from overseas in the past 14 days; or those who are healthcare or aged care workers. Testing is recommended for those cohorts with onset of other clinical symptoms**.
- *Clinical discretion applies including consideration of the potential for co-infection (e.g., concurrent infection with SARS-CoV-2 and influenza)
- **headache, myalgia, stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.

Online resources

- Locations of respiratory assessment clinics and testing sites are available [online and through an interactive map](#).

- [Protecting our healthcare workers \(PDF\)](#) sets out the very latest in our understanding of COVID-19 and how it can spread within healthcare settings – both hospitals and aged-care facilities.
- Visit [Infection Prevention and Control](#) resource hub for updated guidelines.

Mental health resources

- Many Victorians are feeling fatigued, isolated or lonely. If you need support for your mental health there are [mental health resources](#) you can access on our website.

Consumer information

- [Financial support – for COVID-19](#)
- [Translated resources in over 50 languages](#)
- [Checklist for COVID cases](#)