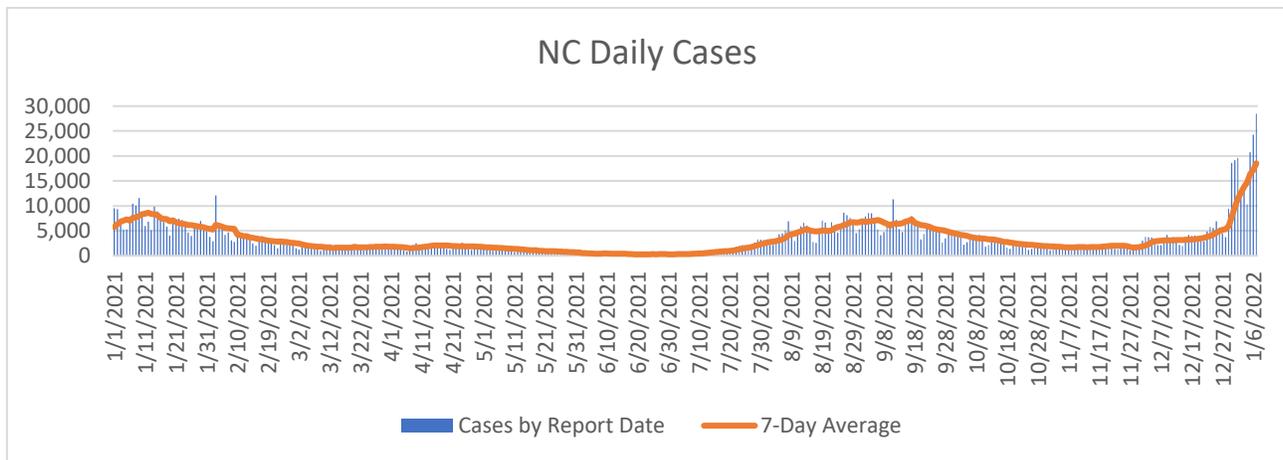


**Kirk of Kildaire
Safe Gathering Task Force**

**Covid-19 Policy Update
January 7, 2022**

The Omicron variant is rapidly driving infections and hospitalizations higher in North Carolina. There continue to be some Delta cases as well.

- ❖ We concentrate on new hospitalizations as the best indicator for making policy decisions because increased use of home tests may lead to undercounting cases and percentage positive tests. In addition, hospitalizations are a simple indicator of serious disease.
- ❖ However, when cases and percentage tests quickly reach high levels as has happened in the last couple of weeks, these data cannot be ignored precisely because the situation is likely to be more serious than these data indicate.
 - As of 1/7/2022, the seven-day average of daily new cases was 18,530, by far the highest 7-day average of the pandemic. (A daily record was set on 1/7/2022 with 28,474 new cases.)



- On 1/5/2022 (the latest date for which data are available) the positive test percentage was 31.2%, by far the highest single-day percentage of the pandemic.
- On 1/6/2022 (the latest date for which data are available), confirmed new hospitalizations were 515, a dramatic rise over the prior. This is uncomfortably high, but lower than the record 536 recorded on 1/5/2021. As hospitalizations are a lagging indicator, they will likely increase over the next few weeks.

New research from the UK suggests that people are much less likely to be hospitalized with Omicron relative to Delta, but because Omicron is so highly transmissible, we may still see record numbers of hospitalization due to higher numbers of cases.

Vaccination continues to be the best defense against Omicron. The UK Health Security Agency reports that when infected, people who have been boosted have an 81% lower risk of hospitalization relative to unvaccinated people. Fewer vaccinations confer less protection.

See the material at the end of this document for required isolation periods for individuals who test positive for Covid-19 or have been exposed to someone with Covid-19.

Mask requirements

While entering any Kirk building, all individuals aged 5 and older must wear a mask that covers both nose and mouth. Masks are highly recommended for children ages 3 and 4.

Six-foot social distancing between households is required indoors until conditions improve, and we can revert to 3-foot distancing. Three-foot distancing is required outdoors, but masks are not required. There are only a few exceptions where masks are not required indoors:

- ❖ Staff when in their personal office or workspace
- ❖ Individuals working alone or with a household member in a room
- ❖ Masks are optional for fully vaccinated staff in the main office hallways and work room. When in the outer office area and visitors are present, all staff must wear a mask.
 - Fully vaccinated means that it has been at least two weeks since a person has received one J&J inoculation or two Pfizer or Moderna inoculations. The Task Force is conferring with Personnel concerning a possible joint request to the Session that the fully vaccinated definition be modified to require a booster according to the following schedule (Following FDA guidance, only Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are acceptable boosters, however this may change with new data showing that a J&J booster is effective against Omicron.):
 - For an initial J&J inoculation, received a booster inoculation 2-4 months after the initial inoculation. Someone who obtains a booster after this time period would be considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the booster. (New data shows the J&J vaccine may be effective for a longer period based on T-cell responses to infection, but this data has not been peer reviewed.)
 - For an initial Pfizer or Moderna series of two inoculations, received a booster inoculation 5-7 months after the initial inoculation. Someone who obtains a booster after this time period would be considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the booster.
- ❖ Pastors and other speakers while speaking during worship services
- ❖ Choirs when singing anthems, responses, and benedictions. Choir members must be spaced 6 feet side to side and 9 feet front to back until conditions improve.
- ❖ Choir conductors and speakers such as someone lecturing to a Sunday School class who is at a substantial distance from the group, *if they are fully vaccinated*
- ❖ There is no requirement for masks outdoors, but three feet spacing between members of different households is required.
- ❖ People who would like more protection for themselves are encouraged to wear N95, KN95 (Chinese N95), or KF94 (Korean N95) masks. KN95 and KF94 masks are more comfortable than N95 masks. Alternatively, they can wear a cloth mask over a surgical mask (double mask).

Vaccination requirements for certain individuals

- Anyone attending a church-sponsored retreat or other event lasting more than three hours must be fully vaccinated.
- All staff are required to be fully vaccinated or existing staff may choose to be tested weekly in lieu of vaccination.

- All volunteers who work with children more than one hour per week are required to be fully vaccinated.

Worship materials

Because surface transmission of Covid-19 is quite rare, we have returned Bibles and hymnals to the pews.

Indoor meeting length; consumption of food and drink

1. Larger group events should not include food and drink consumption indoors.
2. Indoor meetings should last no longer than roughly one hour. If more time is needed, the meeting should be split so that two different locations are used. Different seating patterns should be employed for any indoor meeting in split locations.
3. Participants should not bring food or drinks to snack/sip during indoor meetings since this means there will be multiple mask removals, the potential for talking unmasked and increased opportunities for virus transmission.

Policy relaxation when the state-wide 7-day average of new hospitalizations is less than 250

Indoor distancing between members of different households will once again be reduced to 3 feet. Small groups may have a 5-minute snack/drink period for the group as a whole.

Policy relaxation when the state-wide 7-day average of new hospitalizations is less than 75

The following will apply to small groups of adults and high school students:

- Masks will be optional for fully vaccinated individuals if no one in the group objects. For example: committee meetings, Sunday School classes.
- Meetings/events may last for up to two hours in the same room. (Currently, the restriction is one hour in the same room.)
- Meals may be served.

Policy relaxation on or after February 1, 2022, if the 7-day average of new hospitalizations is less than 50

By February 1, parents of children ages 5-11 will have had sufficient time to get their children immunized. If hospitalizations have decreased below 50:

- Masks will be optional for fully vaccinated individuals for worship and other larger functions where there are no children below the age of 5.
- For children under the age of 5, Sunday School will be extended through the worship service, or another program will be offered, so that they will not be exposed to potential infection from adults not wearing masks in worship.
- The last three rows of the center pews will be reserved for families with children ages 5-11 who are not yet fully vaccinated. Immunocompromised people will also be accommodated in these pews. All individuals sitting in these rows must wear masks.
- Offering plates and communion service may return to the pews as may welcome pads and other miscellaneous materials at the discretion of the Worship Ministry Team.
- We will maintain 3-foot distancing until new hospitalizations in North Carolina are below 25 per day (seven-day average).

New Covid-19 Exposure and Positive Test Policy

1/7/2022

The CDC has recently issued less stringent guidance with respect to what people should do after receipt of a positive Covid-19 test result or exposure to someone with Covid-19.

Background

Research now shows that people are most contagious 1-2 days before and 2-3 days after experiencing symptoms. This is the basis for the shortened isolation periods outlined below.

Note that where masking is specified, a well-fitting mask is required. Most cloth masks and even surgical masks do not qualify because they have too many gaps around the edges. KN-95, KF-94 and N-95 masks are well-fitting as is double-masking with a cloth mask over a surgical mask.

- ❖ CDC uses the term “isolation” to refer to behavior after testing positive and “quarantine” to refer to behavior after close contact with someone known to have Covid-19. This is a technical difference – the term “isolation” is used exclusively in this document.

Where a Covid-19 test is indicated, a rapid (antigen) test is fully acceptable, and at this point in the pandemic is preferable as a follow-up test after an initial positive PCR or antigen test. After an initial positive test and resolution of symptoms, an antigen test will return a positive result if you are still infectious to others. PCR tests may continue to give positive results by detecting genetic viral fragments when you are not infectious.

- ❖ Note, that some rapid tests are unacceptable due to their reduced sensitivity to Omicron. As the problematic tests are only for use by authorized laboratories, they should have taken steps already to halt their use.

What to Do After a Positive Covid-19 Test

If no symptoms (asymptomatic)

- ❖ Isolate for 5 days, then wear a mask when around others for 5 more days. As the Kirk requires masks except for limited circumstances, a person who tests positive would have to wear a mask during the second 5-day period, even where there are limited exceptions.
 - You are welcome to obtain a Covid-19 test after 5 days, but that is not required. If you test positive, you will need to continue isolation until you receive a negative test.

If symptoms

- ❖ Isolate for at least five days. Once symptoms resolve (but no earlier than 5 days), you can end isolation if you get a negative Covid-19 test but must wear a mask for five additional days. This is more stringent than the CDC policy.
 - Many in the media have said that you can end isolation after 5 days. This is not true. You must also no longer have symptoms and, for the Kirk, must have a negative Covid-19 test.

What to do After Close Contact with Someone Who Has Covid-19

We define this as less than 6 feet for 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period. An example would be having someone in a person's household test positive for Covid-19. (When conditions improve, the criterion will change to 3 feet for 15 minutes or more.)

If symptoms occur, isolate until receiving a negative Covid-19 test result

If no symptoms: Boosted or received a second dose of Pfizer/Moderna in last 5 months or received J&J in last 2 months

❖ No isolation required. Wear a mask for 10 days after exposure.

If no symptoms: All others

❖ Isolate for 5 days after exposure. Wear a mask for an additional 5 days. (A negative test after 5 days is desirable, but not required.)

Questions?

If you have questions about what you should do in the above circumstances, contact our Parish Nurse, Caryn Mastalli: cmastalli@kirkofkildaire.org