

The Washington Post

# Coronavirus Updates

Important developments in the pandemic.



By **Derek Hawkins**

✉ Email

*The Post's coronavirus coverage linked in this newsletter is **free to access** from this email.*

## The latest

New infection numbers out of Europe don't look good. Cases are trending up in about a dozen countries, driven by the BA.2 subvariant of omicron, which appears more transmissible than the original version. If previous pandemic patterns hold, **many public health experts say it's possible if not likely that the United States could see a resurgence of infections in the near future.** [A variety of factors could influence the subvariant's spread here](#), including the recent loosening of mask requirements and other public-health measures. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention spokeswoman told The Washington Post that officials aren't seeing an increase in the severity of disease as BA.2 spreads. But another significant wave could put renewed strain on overburdened hospital systems.

**Pfizer and BioNTech have asked drug regulators to green light a second booster — a fourth vaccine dose — for people 65 and older.** The companies cited data on immunity waning after several months and pointed to research out of Israel, one of the only countries administering fourth doses, indicating that the additional shots helped reduce hospitalizations during the country's omicron surge. My colleagues report that [a decision from the Food and Drug Administration could come relatively quickly](#) if regulators believe the data are straightforward. Separately, the FDA plans to meet next month about whether officials should make a concerted effort to encourage boosters going into flu season this fall.

As Congress [spars](#) over whether to approve new pandemic spending, **a Senate panel this week voted overwhelmingly to create an independent task force to probe the government's response to the public-health crisis.** The unit would be modeled on the 9/11 Commission that investigated the government's failures leading up to the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The 20-2 vote is [the closest lawmakers have come to supporting such an investigation](#), but the fate of the effort is up in the air and comes amid separate Democrat- and Republican-led probes aimed at assigning blame ahead of this year's midterm elections.

**Pandemic-driven inflation is weighing hard on ordinary Americans and undercutting U.S. economic recovery.** After the lockdowns and closures of 2020, the economy bounced back too fast, with demand for consumer goods — cars, houses, furniture, groceries — swiftly outpacing supply. We have [a helpful graphic explaining how we got here and why prices keep skyrocketing](#).

## Other important news

The CDC has [lowered coronavirus warnings](#) for cruise ships and popular Caribbean islands. Across the Atlantic, unvaccinated Americans can now travel to France [without seeking special permission](#).

Lawmakers remain deadlocked on new pandemic aid. [Republicans are reluctant to approve a \\$15 billion funding request](#), even as the White House warns of shortfalls in tests, therapeutics and vaccines.

An epidemic of unruly passengers: [Transportation officials have investigated 3,800 mask-related incidents on public transportation and issued \\$644,000 in fines](#), according to a new report.

China's "zero-covid" policy continues to falter as the country battles its worst outbreak in two years. [Lockdowns are spreading, business is stalled, and citizens are miserable.](#)



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## Guide to the pandemic

[Track confirmed cases, hospitalizations and deaths in the U.S.](#) and the spread [around the world.](#)

U.S. vaccine distribution and delivery, [tracked by state.](#)

Guides: [Booster shots](#) | [Finding vaccine appointments](#) | [Vaccines](#) | [Variants](#) | [Masks](#)

[Submit a question](#) and we may answer it in a future story or newsletter.

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## Your questions, answered

*"What about the new BA.2 variant? Do we need to be careful of crowds and wear a mask because it may surge next?"* — Marilyn

in Oregon

As I mentioned above, many experts say a rise in BA.2 cases is likely. Outbreaks in Europe tend to be followed by similar spikes here a few weeks later, so it wouldn't be surprising if we saw some level of resurgence later in the spring.

It's hard to predict when exactly another surge might come or what it will look like. For now, BA.2 still hasn't replaced BA.1 as the dominant variant. And for reasons that aren't entirely clear, it seems to be spreading slower here than overseas. Scientists have also found [evidence](#) that people infected with the original version of omicron have strong protection against BA.2 for at least a few weeks, suggesting that areas hit hard by omicron in the winter [may not see a major uptick in BA.2 cases](#).

But many Americans remain [unvaccinated](#), with some state vaccination rates lagging far behind the national average, and [only half of the booster-eligible population](#) has gotten additional doses. This could leave many communities vulnerable to another wave of infections while possibly sparing those with more widespread vaccine uptake.

Right now, there's no cause for panic. CDC data show that [covid-19 community levels are “low” in the vast majority of the country](#). For these areas, health officials say people [need not mask up unless they want to](#). In areas where covid-19 levels are listed as “medium” or “high,” officials recommend masking and other precautions, particularly for people at high risk of serious illness.

In this newsletter, I often encourage people to err on the side of caution if they're concerned about getting the virus. There's absolutely no harm in masking up and being careful of crowds if that's what you prefer, and you shouldn't feel ashamed or self-conscious if that's what you decide to do. I still take these precautions even though I'm boosted and have no

underlying health conditions. But your approach may be different than mine. At this point in the pandemic, it's all about balancing your risk with the need to go on living without the virus constantly hanging over your head.

Whatever precautions you decide are right for you, I recommend checking the [CDC's covid-19 community level tool](#) regularly to see what cases are like in your county. This could help you make the calculations you need to stay safe and enjoy life. If cases do start to rise, you'll be able to quickly make the right adjustments.

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## Today's top reads

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### Second gentleman Doug Emhoff tests positive for the coronavirus

By Tyler Pager • [Read more »](#)

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### U.S. Capitol complex takes steps toward phased reopening after coronavirus shutdown

By Felicia Sonmez and Marianna Sotomayor • [Read more »](#)

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