

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Variant of Concern Omicron (B.1.1.529): Case, Contact and Outbreak Management

Date: December 8, 2021

Pages: 4

To: Health Care Providers, Assessment Centres, Pharmacies, Hospitals

From: Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health

In response to the evolving situation related to the COVID-19 Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant of concern, the Ministry of Health has provided [interim guidance on case, contact and outbreak management](#) for public health units in an effort to mitigate further transmission.¹ This guidance is to be used as an interim update and in conjunction with Ontario’s existing [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).²

For an overview of the Omicron variant of concern and the testing and quarantine requirements for returning travelers, please review the [WDGPH Physicians Advisory from November 29, 2021](#).³ Additional updates regarding measures for travelers will generally be posted to the [Government of Canada’s website](#)⁴; please note that measures may change frequently over the coming weeks.

Public Health Ontario has provided an [up-to-date risk assessment of the Omicron variant](#) on its website.⁵

Testing for the Omicron Variant

Effective December 6, 2021, the following routine procedures for SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing will apply:

1. Specimens will be sent to routine COVID-19 diagnostic testing labs for SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing.
2. All samples that test positive for SARS-CoV-2 with a cycle threshold (Ct) value of ≤ 35 will be screened for the S gene dropout (SGTF, S gene target failure). This screening is expected to take 1-3 days. Results will be reported per the table below.

Result	Reported as
S gene detected (no S gene dropout)	“No evidence of SARS-CoV-2 S gene deletion at amino acid positions 69-70.”
S gene not detected with Ct ≤ 30	“Result consistent with SARS-CoV-2 S gene target failure (SGTF) due to a deletion at amino acid positions 69-70.”
S gene not detected with Ct > 30	“Inconclusive for SARS-CoV-2 S gene target failure (due to low viral load).”

3. Eligible samples with S gene dropout that have a $Ct \leq 30$ will be sent for whole genome sequencing (WGS) for confirmation of the Omicron variant. This may take an additional 5-10 days to complete. Samples with a $Ct > 30$ are not eligible for WGS.

Alongside this change, Ontario's COVID-19 genomics network will move to sequence 50% of eligible samples for surveillance purposes. The network will continue to sequence all samples with history of international travel.

Definition of Omicron Cases and Persons under Investigation (PUIs)

Enhanced case and contact management will apply to the following individuals and their contacts:

- **Confirmed cases of Omicron:** lab-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection with whole genome sequencing identifying the Omicron variant.
 - **Persons under investigation (PUIs) for the Omicron variant:** confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases with:
 - An epidemiological risk factor for Omicron (i.e. History of travel in the past 14 days outside of Canada; High risk exposure to a returning traveler or a known Omicron case) and the absence of any test result that rules out Omicron.
- OR**
- Test results suggestive of Omicron in the current epidemiological context, including, S gene dropout/SGTF, a positive del69/70 PCR, or a positive N501Y PCR.

Management of Omicron Cases and PUIs

- These individuals will receive daily follow-up from WDGPH's case management team and any additional support required to ensure adherence to isolation.
- A shortened isolation period (i.e. on the basis of a negative test) will not be considered; Omicron cases and PUIs must complete a full 10-day isolation period.

Management of High-Risk Contacts of Omicron Cases/PUIs

- WDGPH will apply a lower threshold for identifying high-risk contacts.
- Isolation will be required for all high-risk contacts regardless of whether they are fully vaccinated or previously positive.
- PCR testing will be highly recommended, immediately and on day seven or later.
- Individuals who are not tested on day seven or later are to continue isolating for 10 additional days (20 days total) or until they receive a negative PCR test result.

Management of Household Members of Asymptomatic High-Risk Contacts of Omicron Cases/PUIs

- Household members of asymptomatic, **unvaccinated** high-risk contacts must self-isolate until the high-risk contact obtains a negative PCR test result. These household members should not attend work, school or child care while self-isolating.
- Household members of fully vaccinated asymptomatic high-risk contacts are not required to self-isolate.

These enhanced measures are being implemented as part of a strategy to contain the Omicron variant until more about it is known. This strategy will evolve based upon the epidemiology of COVID-19 in Ontario, and WDGPH will provide additional updates.

Baseline public health measures, such as masking, distancing, and optimizing ventilation, reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and are expected to be similarly effective against the Omicron variant. Getting fully vaccinated against COVID-19 is still strongly recommended and is expected to reduce the risk of being infected by any COVID-19 variant.

References:

1. Ontario Ministry of Health. COVID-19 Variant of Concern Omicron (B.1.1.529): Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance (version 1.0). November 30, 2021. Available at: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/contact_mgmt/management_cases_contacts_omicron.pdf
2. Ontario Ministry of Health. Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario (version 13.0). August 11, 2021. Available at: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/contact_mgmt/management_cases_contacts.pdf
3. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Physician Advisory: Omicron (B.1.1.529) Variant of Concern. November 29, 2021. Available at: https://wdgpublichealth.ca/sites/default/files/physicians_advisory_-_omicron_voc_nov_29_2021.pdf
4. Government of Canada. COVID-19: Travel, testing and borders. Last updated: November 27, 2021. Available at: <https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid>
5. Public Health Ontario. COVID-19 Variant of Concern Omicron (B.1.1.529): Risk Assessment. December 1, 2021. Available at: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/voc/2021/12/covid-19-omicron-b11529-risk-assessment.pdf?sc_lang=en

For more information, please contact:

Name/Title: Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health
Email: Matthew.Tenebaum@wdgpublichealth.ca
Website: www.wdgpublichealth.ca