First confirmed case of Omicron variant detected by State Lab

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) today announced that the state Health and Environmental Laboratories has found the Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in one Kansas resident.

The Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories are screening all current positive PCR COVID-19 samples received at the lab to look for a specific genetic characteristic that would indicate the Omicron variant. Any samples that screen positive will be sequenced for confirmation of the Omicron variant. Additionally, the lab sequences a random sample of PCR positive COVID-19 samples regardless of whether they pass this screening process. This multi-pronged approach led to the detection of the variant.

"Since the Omicron variant was classified as a Variant of Concern, KDHE's Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories has been working to identify the variant in the state. Through genomic sequencing, they were able to confirm the first case of the Omicron variant in Kansas," **Janet Stanek, Acting Secretary**, said. "The detection of the variant does not come as a surprise. This virus is highly infectious and transmittable. We must do our part to protect ourselves and those around us by using the tools available to us."
The individual with the Omicron variant is a vaccinated adult in Franklin County. This individual has not received a booster dose. No additional details will be released to protect the privacy of the individual.

Health officials urge Kansans to use the following tools to protect against COVID-19 and the Omicron variant.

- Get vaccinated and boosted. Vaccines remain the best tool to protect people from COVID-19, slow transmission and reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging. The three authorized COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalizations, and death. Scientists expect the vaccines to prevent serious illness, hospitalizations, and death in people infected with the Omicron variant. COVID-19 vaccines are now authorized for people ages 5 and over. The COVID-19 booster shots are authorized for all individuals ages 16 and over. To find a vaccine near you, visit Vaccines.gov.
- Wear a mask. Masks offer protection against all variants. It is recommended that people wear a well-fitting mask in public indoor settings in Kansas, where COVID-19 transmission remains high, regardless of vaccination status.
- Get tested. If you are sick or have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, it is recommended that you get tested for COVID-19. COVID-19 tests are available across Kansas. Go to KnowBeforeYouGoKS.com to find a free testing location near you. At-home tests are available for purchase at grocery stores and pharmacies. These can be used at home, work or anywhere and can provide rapid results. If a positive result is received through an at-home test, individuals should follow up with a health care provider about a confirmation test.
- Social distance. When in public settings, stay at least 6 feet from other people, especially if you are at higher risk of getting sick.