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## **Health officials in Riverside County report first case of Omicron variant**

Riverside County health officials are reporting the first confirmed case of the Omicron variant in a 41-year-old fully vaccinated man from the western portion of the county.

Officials received confirmation this week. The individual is not being identified because of confidentiality guidelines.

“The reporting of this case reminds us of the importance of taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in all its forms,” said Dr. Geoffrey Leung, Riverside County public health officer. “The most critical of these steps is to get your first vaccine dose if you haven’t already, and then complete the vaccination series and booster to reduce the spread and prevent severe complications from COVID-19.”

The variant was first reported outside the United States recently and health officials indicated then it was likely the variant would be found in other countries. State health officials on Dec. 1 reported the first case in California from a traveler who had returned to San Francisco from South Africa late last month. The patient had what was described as mild symptoms.

In Riverside County, health officials are investigating whether the individual had traveled before being tested in Los Angeles County Dec. 8 for COVID-19. The sample tested positive and was sent to a laboratory for genome sequencing, which showed positive for the Omicron variant.

“We knew that it was likely the variant would eventually arrive in Riverside County, so this is no surprise or cause for widespread concern,” said Kim Saruwatari, director of Public Health. “The same steps that helped protect us against the virus in the past remain in place.”

In addition to vaccination, officials are encouraging residents to continue to wear facemasks, avoid large public gatherings and wash their hands frequently.

COVID-19 vaccines have been available in Riverside County since December 2020, and more than 3.4 million doses have been administered between Public Health clinics and those operated by community partners, such as pharmacies, hospitals, private health providers and private clinics.

Vaccines are available for anyone 5 years and older and boosters are available for anyone 16 and older.

Those seeking information about locations for clinics or to make an appointment can use <https://myturn.ca.gov> or call 951-358-5000. For more information about the vaccine or COVID-19, click [www.rivcoph.org/coronavirus](http://www.rivcoph.org/coronavirus)