

Thousands of Michigan health care workers test positive for COVID-19 as Omicron surge accelerates

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As the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is spreading rapidly and infecting a record number of people across the state, more than 3,000 health care workers at five major hospital chains in Michigan have tested positive for COVID-19 over the past week.

As of Thursday morning, Henry Ford Health System based in Detroit had 989 employees, approximately 3 percent of its workforce, in COVID-19 quarantine or isolation. Dr. Adnan Munkarah, the hospital system's chief clinical officer, reported to Fox 2 Detroit on Tuesday, "We had to temporarily close 97 beds in three of our hospitals, mostly due to staffing challenges."

Dr. Munkarah added that the test positivity rate at the health care system was at 41.8 percent. "We are bracing for one of the bleakest months yet we have faced throughout this pandemic. Unfortunately, we are starting to see the effects of the holiday curve and the fast-spreading Omicron variant."

On Wednesday afternoon, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported 27,346 new cases—the highest daily case count since the start of the pandemic—and 277 deaths from coronavirus.

The previous record high 7-day average of cases in Michigan, set more than a year ago, was surpassed on December 29 with 8,402. This number rose to 13,673 on Wednesday, and the statewide test positivity rate reached 30.8 percent. A new record of 4,557 patients with COVID-19 are now hospitalized, with 123 patients under the age of 18 and 74 percent of these children hospitalized in Metro Detroit.

Also speaking to Fox 2 Detroit on Tuesday, Dr. Dennis Cunningham, a pediatric specialist and director of infection control and prevention of the Henry Ford Health System, said, "This pandemic is not slowing

down, and we are still surging. ... The steep increases in the number of infections continues to limit our ability to provide Monoclonal antibody treatment." The hospital system was down to 30 doses of the medicine used to treat people after they have been hospitalized with COVID-19.

The spike in hospitalizations—Henry Ford has 480 COVID-19 patients at its eight hospitals in southeast Michigan—plus the impact of the virus on staff, as well as the limited inventory of antibody kits is precisely the combination of circumstances that will lead to an increase in suffering and death during the Omicron surge.

While the corporate media and other mouthpieces of the ruling elite keep repeating the unsubstantiated claim that Omicron is "less severe than Delta," the rapid spread of the latest variant is overtaking the health care infrastructure and underscoring the fact that the ruling elite is prepared to continue to allow people to get sick and die from the coronavirus.

On Thursday, Beaumont Health with nine hospitals in the Detroit area reported that 430 employees had COVID-19 symptoms in a notice sent to the public entitled, "We're at a breaking point." The notice said that hospitalizations have increased 40 percent in the last week, and the majority of the COVID-19 patients are unvaccinated.

Dr. Jeffrey Fischgrund, chief of clinical services at Beaumont Health, told the *Detroit Free Press*, "We are really at a point where it's the worst it's ever been and ... we're afraid it's going to get even worse next week. So, we're trying to be proactive. We're cutting back on things that we don't have to do today, but we still want to take care of our patients."

Trinity Health Michigan, with five hospitals in southeast and three hospitals in western Michigan, reported more than 900 health care workers who have COVID-19 as of Wednesday.

At Michigan Medicine in Ann Arbor, 200 surgeries have been postponed because of bed shortages and 572 staff testing positive for COVID-19. Beata Mostafavi, a spokesperson for the University of Michigan health system, called the crisis a “dire situation” and lamented, “These are heartbreaking decisions that we know have significant health impacts for our patients and their families.”

At Spectrum Health in western Michigan, 766 staff had tested positive for COVID-19 over a 7-day period through Wednesday. Chad Tuttle, a vice president of hospital operations, reported that the positivity rates among employees are running at a rate of 10 to 20 times that which occurred during the surge of the Delta variant in the fall.

Tuttle also made the point that those who are testing positive are 99.9 percent vaccinated with 50 percent having had a booster shot. Spectrum has been forced to temporarily close specific locations within the location in order to consolidate resources at their hospitals, emergency departments and urgent care centers.

By and large these are nonemergency-related operations, he told WZZM13. “But we do want the community to be prepared that we will likely have additional services that we may need to shut down in the coming days, just because we simply don’t have staff available. ... We’re very concerned about what the next several weeks looks like, as Omicron is spreading so rapidly.”

On Tuesday, Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced that she is self-isolating from her husband Marc Mallory after he tested positive and is seeking further confirmation. On Wednesday, she reported that she tested negative after her own PCR test. According to a statement, the governor said she and her family had taken extra precautions during the holidays to limit contact with others.

The increasingly desperate situation developing in Michigan hospitals, as well as hospitals throughout the country, was known to be coming for weeks by the scientific experts who warned about the impact of Omicron on the health care systems in the US. For example, Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center

for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, warned in November that the US was “about to enter Covid hell,” a “dark winter” and the “darkest days of the pandemic.”

Speaking on CNBC on November 11, Osterholm said, “We have not even come close to the peak and, as such, our hospitals are now being overrun. The next three to four months are going to be, by far, the darkest of the pandemic.”

While these warnings were being issued by Osterholm and other epidemiologists and public health scientists, the official policy of the Biden administration and state governments was to insist that no extraordinary measures would be taken to shut down the spread of the virus and that Omicron was not going to be as bad as the previous waves of the pandemic.

On December 16, Dr. Osterholm appeared on CNN and said, “I think we’re really just about to experience a viral blizzard. I think in the next three to eight weeks, we’re going to see millions of Americans are going to be infected with this virus, and that will be overlaid on top of Delta, and we’re not yet sure exactly how that’s going to work out.”

Osterholm then specifically mentioned the impact on health care workers. “What you have here right now is a potential perfect storm. I’ve been very concerned about the fact that we could easily see a quarter or a third of our health care workers quickly becoming cases themselves.”

None of these warnings were heeded. In November when the present surge was building with primarily Delta variant infections, Governor Whitmer, following the lead of the Biden White House, said there would be no “mandates.” She issued a perfunctory public health advisory before Thanksgiving that placed emphasis on vaccinations and recommended that people wear masks at indoor holiday gatherings regardless of vaccine status but made clear that there would be no serious effort to stop the spread of the virus.



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