



News Release

Contact: Amy Blaser, vice president

Phone: 402-562-3371

Email: aebblaser@columbushosp.org

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Stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations and booster shots

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – Local health experts are stressing the importance of COVID-19 vaccinations and booster shots, as data shows that vaccines and booster doses protect individuals from COVID-19 infection and severe outcomes.

For adults and adolescents eligible for a first booster dose, these shots are safe and provide substantial benefits, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's why Columbus Community Hospital and East Central District Health Department recommend community members stay up to date on their vaccinations.

"Right now, we are seeing a decline in COVID-19 cases in our health district," said Jessica Hicks, chief public health officer at East Central District Health Department. "But, we are also watching the BA2 variant that is prominent in Europe. If the United States follows that trend, we could see another wave in a few weeks."

According to the CDC, those boosted were 21 times less likely to die from COVID-19 during the recent Omicron surge than those who were unvaccinated, and seven times less likely to be hospitalized. Experts recommend that all eligible adults, adolescents and children 5 and older be up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines, including getting an initial booster when eligible.

"We are very pleased to see a decline in hospitalizations due to COVID-19," said Mike Hansen, president and CEO of the hospital. "We want to keep it that way. Being up to date with vaccination is critical for preventing severe illness from COVID-19 and for reducing the likelihood of new variants from emerging."

ECDHD will be offering second booster shots to those who are immunocompromised and over 50 years old. This comes after the FDA issued a regulatory action, authorizing a second booster dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for older people and certain immunocompromised individuals.

The CDC also updated its recommendations to allow certain immunocompromised individuals and people over the age of 50 who received an initial booster dose at least four months ago to be eligible for another mRNA booster to increase their protection against severe disease from



COVID-19. Separately, adults who received a primary vaccine and booster dose of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine at least four months ago may now receive a second booster dose using an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

"I highly encourage anyone eligible for a first or second booster to do so, even if they have already had COVID," said Hicks. "The next wave is on its way, and this will help protect ourselves and others from getting severely ill."

A first booster dose is recommended for all individuals 12 and older who have already completed a primary COVID-19 vaccination or series.

A second booster dose is recommended for the following people:

- Individuals 50 years and older.
- Individuals 12 years and older who are considered moderately to severely immunocompromised.
- Those for whom it has been at least four months since they received a first booster dose of any authorized or approved COVID-19 vaccine.
- Individuals choosing to receive Moderna (Spikevax™) for their booster must be 18 years and older.
- Those choosing to receive Pfizer (Comirnaty™) for their booster must be 12 years and older.

Hicks also stressed the importance of stocking up on COVID-19 at-home tests. Every home in the U.S. is eligible to order two sets of four free at-home tests at <https://www.covid.gov/tests>. ECDHD also provides free tests in Columbus and Schuyler.

The ECDHD Columbus vaccine clinic is available from 3 to 5 p.m. every Monday and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. every Wednesday. The ECDHD Schuyler clinic is available from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Friday.

For more information on COVID-19 protocols at Columbus Community Hospital, visit www.columbushosp.org. To learn more about COVID-19 in Boone, Colfax, Nance and Platte counties, visit <https://ecdhd.ne.gov>.