Med Center Health®

[VIDEO TRANSCRIPT]

COVID-19 Omicron Variant Q&A

[MUSIC] *How can people protect themselves from the fast spreading Omicron Variant?*

[WILLIAM MOSS, M.D., MEDICAL DIRECTOR – EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT]

> The only factor you can protect yourself with is be prepared by having your immune system ready to take it. I almost can say there will be hardly any family, any person that won't be exposed to this over the next two to three weeks.

[HEATHER LUSBY, D.O., INFECTIOUS DISEASE & TRAVEL MEDICINE SPECIALISTS]

> We stress very much for people to get vaccinated – not only the initial series but also getting a booster.

[DR. MOSS]

> If you're vaccinated with a booster you've got a really good chance of doing fine and being just a mild cold. As I've seen in the Emergency Department, the majority of cases, almost the entire people that we are seeing that are the sickest are unvaccinated or unboosted at this point. You're going to have to be just really be diligent to try to avoid getting sick – and to do that, you need to have your vaccination and your booster.

[DR. LUSBY]

> And then also mask wearing. That also can help to reduce the spread.

[MUSIC] *What makes Omicron different and why should people pay attention?*

[DR. MOSS]

> Well, the Omicron variant is different because it has so many mutations. It allows it to spread fast.

[DR. LUSBY]

> More transmissible than even Delta. It should be a complete wake-up call for people that are getting this virus.

[DR. MOSS]

> This was first detected just about six weeks ago in Africa, and now it's absolutely booming in every community in the United States and across the world. You need to be aware of it because you need to be prepared. And if you have the opportunity to get your vaccination started or get the booster then that should happen.

[MUSIC] *Why should someone who is on the fence about vaccination get their vaccine?*

[DR. MOSS]

Well, the vaccine doesn't prevent you to get the disease. That's been known since the beginning. It's always been preached about this from the people who know the science of vaccinations.

[DR. LUSBY]

Even if you have the vaccine, yes you do have a risk; but, you reduce your risk of hospitalization, you reduce your risk of getting severely ill and death. Which, I mean, that's what we're trying to prevent here.

[DR. MOSS]

If you have the vaccination, you're going to be prepared for it within your own body, and you should be able to fight this off, and it will be like a mild cold – versus having not vaccination and have no immune system protection, and then you can get very sick from this and it can put you in the hospital.

[DR. LUSBY]

Getting a head cold versus being in the hospital dying – that's a way big difference, so get vaccinated.

[MUSIC] *What precautions do we need to take to slow the spread of the Omicron variant?*

[DR. LUSBY]

The precautions the public needs to take to slow the variant include mask wearing – that's a proper-fitting mask. Especially getting vaccinated, which is the most important thing. And if you haven't gotten your booster shot, get your booster.

[DR. MOSS]

Vaccinations are the key to getting our society through this pandemic.

[DR. LUSBY]

And then, obviously, if you have symptoms isolate yourself and get tested.

[DR. MOSS]

We know how to protect ourselves. We protect ourselves from polio, from scarlet fever, from all kinds of different things we have vaccinations for, which we don't have to face as a society now. We've learned these things from the past. And so, we need to be vigilant in taking these precautions that we've known for decades.

[DR. LUSBY]

As long as we still have people that are unvaccinated and we can allow this to spread, this virus will continue to spread. We're going to continue to get more variants. Getting vaccinated reduces the ability to have more variants. So get your vaccine.

[MUSIC] *What does it look like in the ER right now?*

[DR. MOSS]

The Emergency Room right now is just swamped. And that's an understatement. The ER is full of cases with COVID and COVID-related type issues. And even if it's not a COVID-related issue, it has to be assessed and evaluated in each case because sometimes people come in with symptoms of heart disease, lung disease and other problems that would have been common to take care of and easily done

two or three years ago. But now we have to stop, isolate and mask, and do all the precautions for COVID – test, and get all that back as part of their process. It does slow things down, and in addition to that it does take up bed space for people who are waiting in the waiting room and who eventually just kind of give up and don't even come see a doctor because they have to wait so long. So, the ER, we 're just basically – and this is everywhere, this is across the entire nation – we are just swamped right now and there's almost no way to get around everything.

[MUSIC] *When is a person the most contagious?*

[DR. LUSBY]

Someone is most contagious when they are two days before they have symptoms and then three days after the onset of symptoms. Those five days – two prior, three after – that's when you are the highest transmissibility to give it to somebody else.

[MUSIC] *If you've been exposed, how long should you wait before testing?*

[DR. LUSBY]

If you've been exposed, it's estimated to wait about five days after exposure to get tested. And, if you're symptomatic prior to then, obviously get tested then.

[MUSIC] *Final thoughts from Dr. Moss…*

[DR. MOSS]

I wish that we had approached this pandemic as we approached 9-11. Because on 9-12, we came together as a country and we fought back, and we took care of things. We have lost track of common sense. We have lost track of the things that have made our society safer over the years. And we have let our hesitancy, to put trust in science aside, to the point where we have prolonged this pandemic. As a society, we basically need to just step back, take a deep breath and just look at what got us out of pandemics in the past. And not be so judgmental of people, but let's work together to get through this.

[MUSIC]