



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

DEC 30 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Tools to Mitigate the Threat of the Omicron Variant of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in the Department of Defense

This memorandum provides an update on tools to mitigate the threat of the Omicron variant of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the DoD.

The Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, was first reported to the World Health Organization on November 24, 2021. Even though much remains unknown about the new variant, evidence suggests that it is more transmissible than previous COVID-19 variants. Even if the Omicron variant proves to be milder than other COVID-19 variants, its transmissibility has the ability to overwhelm our health care systems and impact the operational readiness of our Forces. While the Omicron variant's characteristics may differ from other variants, the tools that we have successfully used throughout the pandemic, such as masking, physical distancing, teleworking, testing, and vaccination, remain effective and must be continuously implemented.

To that end, I remind you that the following existing tools protect the Force against COVID-19 infection:

Vaccination

- Vaccination with a COVID-19 vaccine remains the best tool to protect against COVID-19 (including the Omicron variant).
- Leaders should urge their fully vaccinated personnel to receive an mRNA vaccine (i.e., Pfizer-BioNTech/Comirnaty or Moderna) COVID-19 booster dose. Booster doses, while not mandatory, are essential to protect against breakthrough infections, which appear to be accelerated due to the Omicron variant.
- Military Health System leaders should closely monitor demand for boosters and increase capacity as needed.

Testing

- Leaders should re-familiarize themselves with testing and quarantine procedures.¹

¹ Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, "Force Health Protection Guidance (Supplement 15) Revision 3 – Department of Defense Guidance for Coronavirus Disease 2019 Laboratory Testing Services," December 30, 2021 (FHP Guidance (Supplement 15), Revision 3)

- Leaders should ensure team members are staying at home if they are symptomatic.²
- Additional, updated guidance on testing is included in FHP Guidance (Supplement 15), Revision 3, located at: <https://www.defense.gov/Spotlights/Coronavirus-DOD-Response/Latest-DOD-Guidance/>.

Masking

- Leaders must ensure compliance with DoD guidance on the wearing of masks.³ COVID-19 is an aerosolized virus that circulates in closed settings and spreads easily in office settings.
- Leaders must combat COVID-19 fatigue. Data suggests that individuals have become more relaxed in masking and physical distancing in office and close congregant settings.
- Guidance on masking is included in the Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Use of Masks and Other Public Health Measures,” February 4, 2021.

Other Non-Pharmaceutical Measures

- Due to the rapid rise of Omicron, installation commanders should be prepared to rapidly increase Health Protection Condition (HPCON) levels if case counts rise. The HPCON framework⁴ provides a mechanism by which to increase or decrease the use of non-pharmaceutical measures, such as physical distancing, depending on local surrounding community case counts.
- DoD Components should ensure that their subordinate units are following DoD guidance with respect to non-pharmaceutical measures.
- Ventilation has been shown to limit the spread of COVID-19. If in an office space, seek opportunities to increase air flow (as appropriate based on security and other measures). Subject to mission requirements, commanders and supervisors must assign telework if possible to decrease normal space occupancy.

Recommended Communication

- I urge you to communicate at all levels to emphasize the importance of prevention. Model the way.

² Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, “Force Health Protection Guidance (Supplement 18) Revision 1-Department of Defense Guidance for Protecting All Personnel in Department of Defense Workplaces During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic,” March 17, 2021.

³ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Use of Masks and Other Public Health Measures,” February 4, 2021

⁴ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Guidance for Commanders' Risk-Based Responses and Implementation of the Health Protection Condition Framework During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic,” April 29, 2021

- A variety of communication mechanisms are available to you.
 - Engage in direct and repeated dialogue with subordinates.
 - Address memos to your unit/organization.
 - Post to safety messages social media sites frequently.
 - Create video messages to the workforce.
 - Publish public facing articles in coordination with public affairs.

The continued use of these FHP tools will increase readiness and enable DoD to continue to protect the force, protect our families, and defend the Nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.