

COVID-19 Update: Changing data reporting frequency from daily to weekly

January 25, 2023

The virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) emerged in late 2019. Since April 2020, the Chicago Department of Public Health has provided daily updates on COVID-19 activity through the [City of Chicago's COVID-19 Response website](#). Beginning the week of January 25, 2023, the main [COVID-19 dashboard](#) will be updated weekly rather than daily. Underlying datasets related to cases, hospitalizations, deaths, and vaccine coverage on the [Chicago Data Portal](#) will be also updated once a week. These changes are in alignment with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 Community Level framework. While COVID-19 is still very much with us, we are in a much different place than we were earlier in the pandemic. We now know how the virus spreads and who is at highest risk, we know much more about how to treat it, and we have ample tools to prevent infection and minimize severe disease.

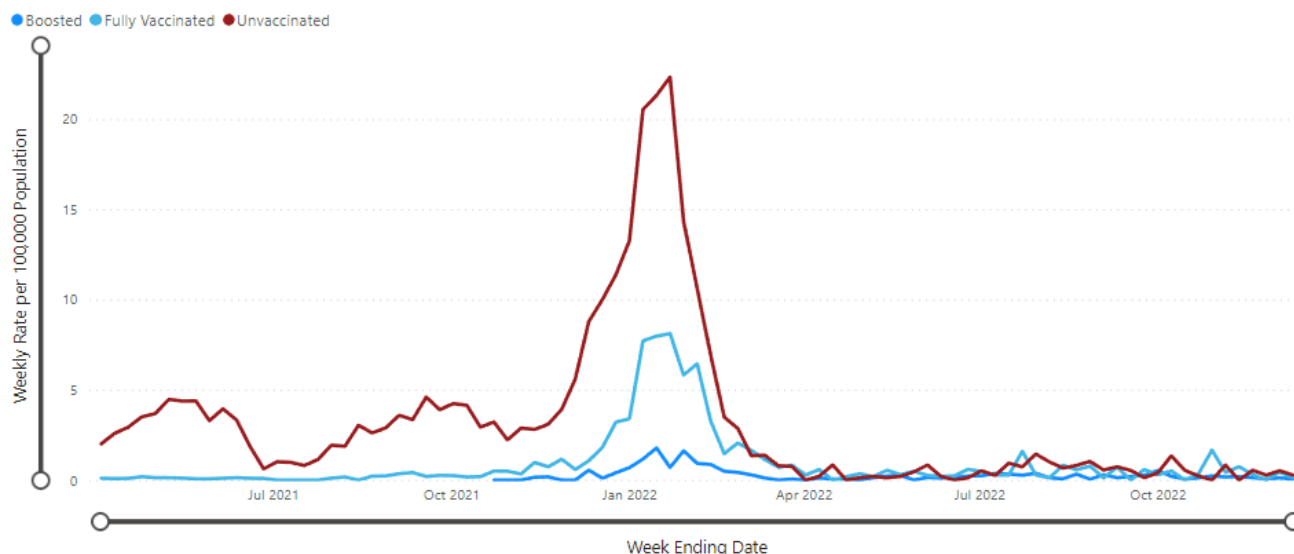
Chicagoans have developed better immunity to COVID-19

At the start of the pandemic in early 2020, Chicagoans had no prior immunity to COVID-19 and were therefore at greater risk of serious outcomes. Most Chicagoans now have some immune protection against COVID-19 through previous infection and vaccination. Vaccination continues to be the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19, and we now have vaccines specifically formulated to fight the Omicron variant of COVID-19. As of January 2023, more than 80% of Chicagoans have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (71% of Chicagoans have received more than one dose, and 41% have received at least one booster). CDPH continues to share information about COVID-19 vaccinations on its [website](#) and is also now adding data about the number of bivalent boosters administered to Chicagoans. Additionally, as of April-June 2022, 96% of Illinois residents who donated blood had COVID-19 antibodies through prior COVID-19 infection or vaccination.

The COVID-19 death rate in Chicago is much lower than it was in the early days of the pandemic

In the first half of May 2020, nearly 350 Chicagoans were dying each week due to COVID-19. However, both the number of Chicagoans dying from COVID-19 and the proportion of Chicagoans infected with COVID-19 who die from it have fallen over the years. At its peak in June 2020, 8.5% of reported COVID-19 cases resulted in death. By December 2022, this had decreased to 0.3%.

Weekly Rate of COVID-19 Deaths by Vaccination Status



Tests are widely available, and we can effectively treat COVID-19

At-home tests, which are easy to use and produce rapid results, can be purchased in many pharmacies, stores, and online. Low or no cost testing is available at community health centers and pharmacies throughout Chicago. The scientific and medical community has learned who is at highest risk of COVID-19 and how to treat people to prevent severe illness and death. While there were no known treatments in the early days of COVID-19, there are now several effective treatments available. We also now understand who is at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (older individuals [and those with certain medical conditions](#)). Three antiviral medications are approved to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 in people who are more likely to get very sick - Nirmatrelvir with Ritonavir (Paxlovid), Remdesivir (Veklury) and Molnupiravir (Lagevrio). When given in the first few days of illness, they have been shown to significantly reduce the risk of hospitalization or death. More treatments are also available for those hospitalized with COVID-19, and healthcare providers have learned a lot about how to manage the condition since it first emerged.

We have new ways of monitoring COVID-19 transmission

The data displayed on the COVID-19 dashboard is only a slice of the data we review at CDPH to determine current risk levels. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, CDPH has established new surveillance systems. Two examples of this are monitoring [wastewater \(sewage\)](#) for SARS-CoV-2 and tracking [genetic mutations](#) of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Infected individuals both with and without symptoms can shed SARS-CoV-2 in their stool; testing wastewater can monitor the levels of transmission even when clinical and at-home testing information is limited. There has been wastewater testing in Chicago since late 2020, and CDPH began directly funding and directing the wastewater monitoring project in Chicago in late 2021. As of January 2023, SARS-CoV-2 wastewater testing data is available on the Chicago Data Portal. Wastewater is collected and tested multiple times per week, so these datasets are updated weekly with new information.

CDPH also monitors SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern like Omicron and its sublineages through the Regional Innovative Public Health Laboratory (RIPHL), a partnership with Rush University Medical Center. While emergence of new variants is expected, some are concerning to public health as they might spread more easily, evade vaccines or treatment, or cause severe disease. Variant information can be found on the [CDPH COVID-19 Response website](#).

