

## A Message from the President & CEO Mark Parkinson

### OMICRON VARIANT COULD OVERWHELM THE UNITED STATES WITH COVID: BOOSTERS ARE THE ANSWER

After 11 years with AHCA/NCAL, I hope my reputation is one of a calm optimist. It's the way I strive to lead the organization.

Unfortunately, I'm seeing some trends in the Omicron data that have led me to believe there is a reasonable chance that the United States will set new daily COVID-19 records in the next two to four weeks. It's possible that COVID numbers will dramatically exceed what we saw last December. It's for that reason that I'm sounding this alarm. **You need to be ready.**

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to prepare, but you need to act quickly. Before I get to those steps, I want to share what I'm seeing in the data that has led me to this concern. I've included that information below, as well as in this [short video](#).

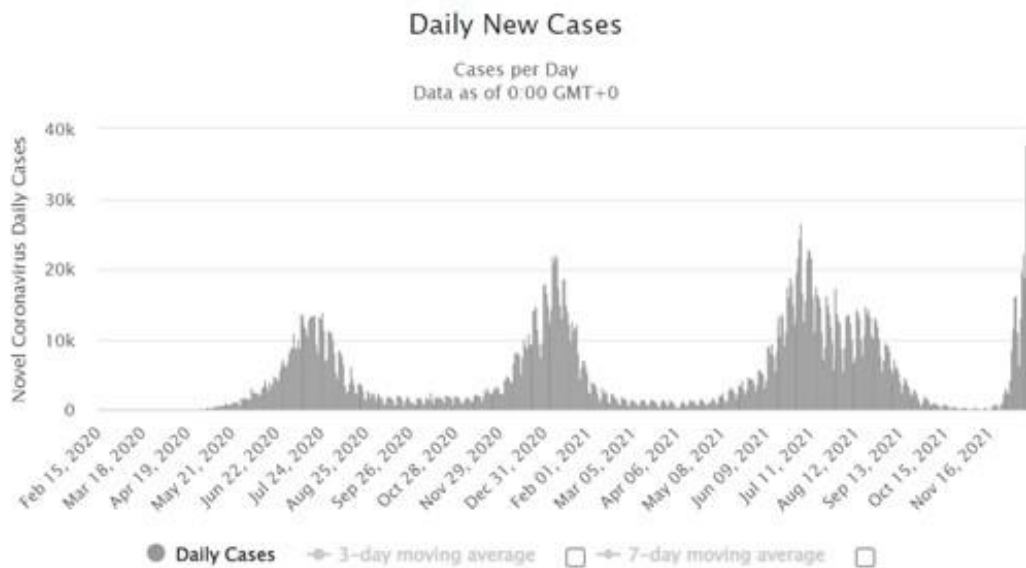
#### ***OMICRON IS INCREASING EXPONENTIALLY IN SOUTH AFRICA***

Omicron was first identified in South Africa only a handful of weeks ago. The clinicians that saw it observed its very quick spread among people who had close contact with Omicron-positive patients. *Very quick.* Delta is a variant that had a rapid spread. Omicron appeared to be surpassing Delta and is four to five times more infectious than the Delta variant.

Unfortunately, the data from other countries now verify this clinical observation that the number of infections from Omicron is doubling every two to three days. This the chart of the spread of COVID in South Africa.

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## Daily New Cases in South Africa

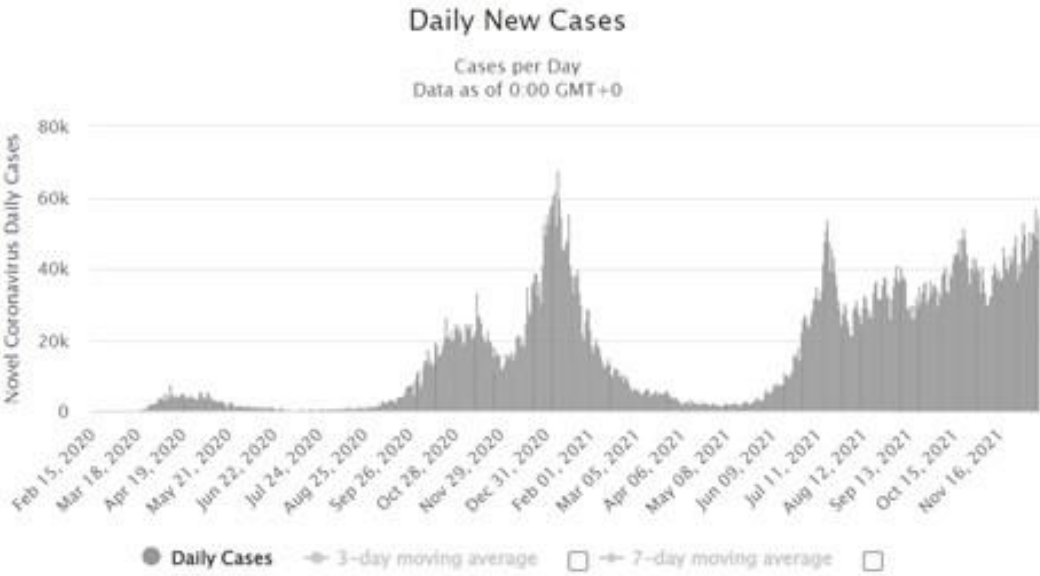


You can see on the right side of the chart an almost unbelievable increase in cases over a very short period of time. As recently as two weeks ago, there were less than 1,000 cases a day. Yesterday, South Africa reported almost 40,000 cases.

This spread is not limited to South Africa. Omicron has now been identified in almost 100 countries around the world. We can look at countries that started reporting Omicron a week or so ago and see the impact it has had on overall COVID numbers. Below is a chart of cases in the United Kingdom.

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# Daily New Cases in the United Kingdom

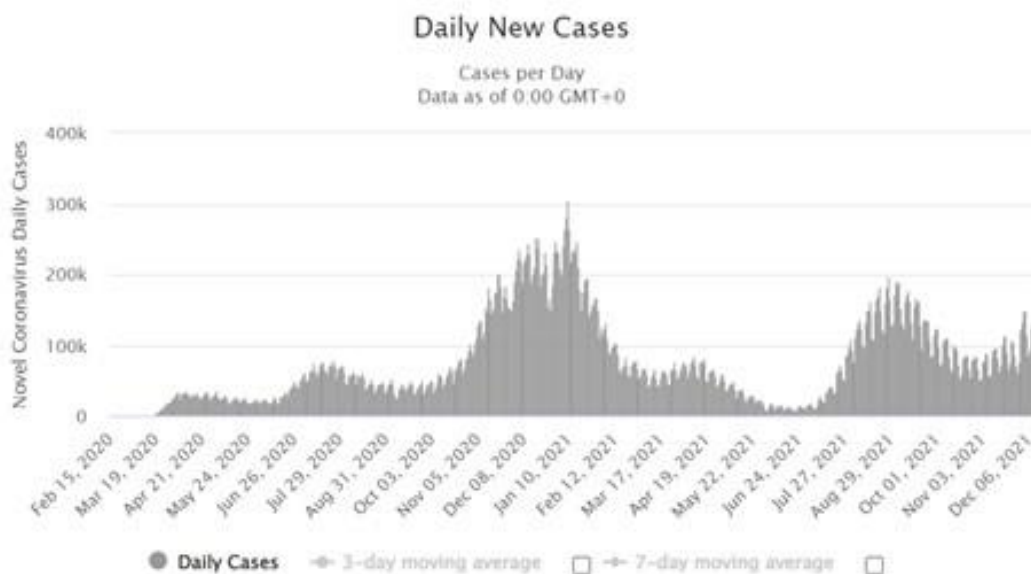


You can see the increase the UK has experienced. In all probability, the UK will start reporting record numbers of daily cases within the next several days, and Omicron will replace Delta as the most common variant causing infections.

Sadly, Omicron is also in the United States, and we will soon see our numbers increase.

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## Daily New Cases in the United States



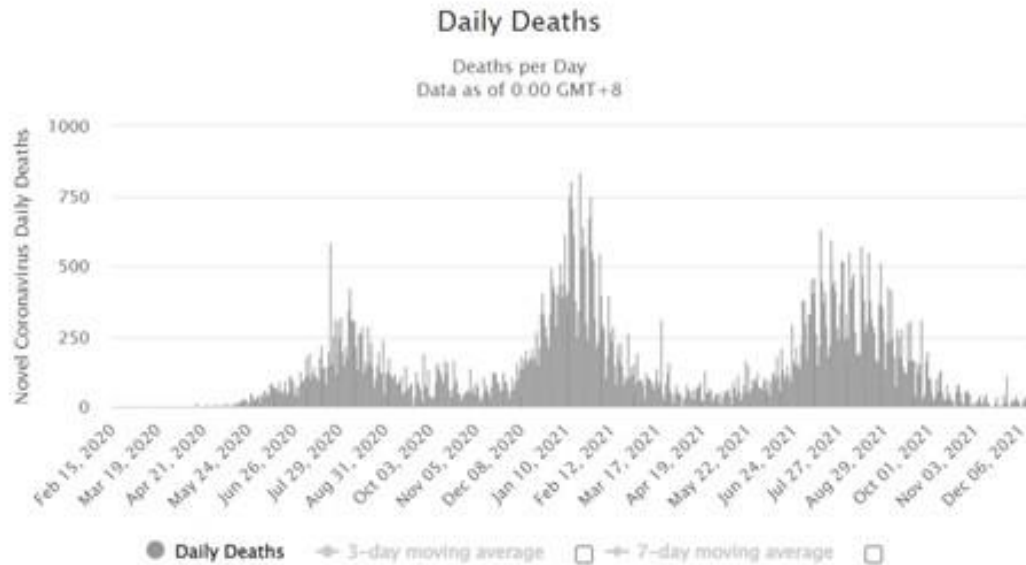
We thought we had hit our daily high in case counts last December, but I worry this new variant may cause more cases compared to the December 2020 highs and perhaps even dramatically surpass them.

### ***OMICRON IS NOT AS DEADLY AS DELTA BUT WILL STILL PRESENT MAJOR PROBLEMS***

The really good news is that Omicron does not appear to be as deadly as Delta and the original COVID variants. However, this is from preliminary data among young adults. It's still very early to make this a definitive statement, but the data is promising. But even if less virulent, it will cause an increase in hospitalizations and deaths. In South Africa, hospitalizations and deaths have increased but nowhere near the level that you would expect if the variant was as deadly as earlier strains. We don't know what will happen when this variant infects the elderly and immunocompromised, many of the residents for whom we care in our facilities.

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## Daily New Deaths in South Africa



Nevertheless, this will still cause major problems in the United States and in our buildings:

1. Even if the mortality rate is very low, because of the large number of our residents and staff that are likely to get Omicron, we may have a lot of hospitalizations and deaths.
2. Even if the mortality rate is low, we will have significant numbers of staff that test positive and be unable to work. This is going to make our staffing problems even worse. We will have some time where large numbers of staff are testing positive.

### ***BOOSTERS ARE THE ANSWER***

We have both bad and good news about the vaccine effectiveness against Omicron. We now have evidence indicating that the normal two-dose regimen of Pfizer and Moderna and the single dose regimen of Johnson & Johnson does not stop Omicron. There is some protection for the immediate six months after the final dose, but after that, the effectiveness drops to about 30 percent. That is the bad news. The good news is that for people who receive a booster, the effectiveness increases to around 75 percent against getting COVID, and the protection from hospitalization and death is much higher than that.

The obvious conclusion from all of this is please focus on the booster shots. Right now, only 51 percent of residents and 22 percent of eligible staff have boosters.

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It's time for you to ramp up your efforts to increase these numbers. We have resources that can help with this on our [#GetVaccinated](#) website.

Additionally, the CDC has created a [webpage](#) to help LTC providers access the booster dose. Providers should work with their LTC pharmacies to gain access to the booster dose. If you are having trouble accessing the vaccine, please contact your state or local health department's immunization program. The appropriate contact for each immunization program can be found [here](#). You may also contact [COVID19@ahca.org](mailto:COVID19@ahca.org) with any questions or for additional assistance.

**Booster shots are the answer.**

***THERE COULD BE A SILVER LINING TO THIS***

It is possible that tens of millions of Americans will get Omicron, and because of vaccines and treatments we now have, very few will die. This may create the herd immunity that we have previously not been able to achieve. There are lots of ways this can go, but my glass half full attitude says we have to consider that maybe this is the beginning of the end of the entire pandemic. Or it might not be. Only time will tell. Either way, the path to get there includes getting vaccinated and getting the booster as soon as possible.

In the meantime, thanks for all you are doing every day. Hang in there, and we will continue to get through this.

Sincerely,



**Mark Parkinson**  
President & CEO, AHCA/NCAL

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