

## COMMENTARY

## 10 reasons why Omicron could cause big destruction

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As a physician first and a mental health clinician second, I hope to provide factual medical information on the Omicron variant to my patients, family members, and friends. I also try to remain curious instead of angry about why some choose not to vaccinate.

The most effective way to encourage people to obtain a vaccination is to use communication free of judgment and criticism, which allows a safe space for the unvaccinated to express their motivations and fears behind their current choice of not vaccinating and explore possible barriers to an alternative option that could lead to vaccination.



Dr. Dara Abraham

As an adult psychiatrist, ADHD specialist, and amateur COVID-19 expert, I'd like to offer 10 reasons why Omicron – which ironically means “small” in Latin, can still cause big destruction. Please share these 10 reasons with your patients.

- Long-haul symptoms from COVID-19 <<https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2021/12/29/fauci-interview-long-covid-still-a-risk-with-milder-omicron-cases>> infection are still possible even for people who contract a milder case of the Omicron variant.
- The monoclonal antibody and antiviral treatments [recently approved](https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-new-long-acting-monoclonal-antibodies-pre-exposure) <<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-new-long-acting-monoclonal-antibodies-pre-exposure>> by the Food and Drug Administration for pre-exposure prevention of COVID-19 are limited. For many reasons, now is not the best time to play Russian roulette and intentionally get infected with a “mild” variant.
- There are not enough testing sites or over-the-counter rapid COVID tests available to keep up with the demand, and the latter are cost prohibitive for many people.
- Emergency care during the next few weeks for unforeseen non–COVID-related illnesses, such as a sudden heart attack or stroke, may be affected by the shortage of medical providers because of illness, quarantine, and burnout.
- There will be fewer first responders, including EMTs, police officers, and firefighters, because of COVID quarantines from illness and exposure.
- Although most Americans oppose temporary shutdowns, de facto shutdowns might be necessary because of the absence of healthy, COVID-negative individuals to maintain a functional society.
- Omicron math is deceiving, since the risk of hospitalization with Omicron [appears to be far lower](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-) <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021->

Omicron will offset the lower severity leading to comparable numbers of hospitalizations.

- Omicron has made it difficult for some schools to reopen after the holiday break, and reopening might become even more difficult as the surge progresses. Many schools already were in desperate need of substitute teachers, bus drivers, and additional staff necessary for COVID safety precautions before the emergence of the Omicron variant.
- And, for a less altruistic reason, as if the nine reasons above weren't enough – if infections continue, especially among the unvaccinated – where the virus mutates the most – this can lead to a trifecta variant that not only evades the immune system and is highly infectious but causes severe disease in both the unvaccinated as well as the vaccinated.

Because of its extremely high transmissibility, the Omicron variant – layered atop Delta – presents great risk to us as a society. We must do all we can as clinicians to educate our patients so that they can protect themselves and their families.

*Dr. Abraham is a psychiatrist in private practice in Philadelphia. She has no disclosures.*

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