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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Xian battles COVID-19 in worst outbreak to hit a Chinese city this year

BEIJING, Dec 30 (Reuters) - China's industrial and tech hub of Xian reported on Thursday more than 100 new cases of COVID-19, taking its tally of locally transmitted infections to the highest in any Chinese city this year.

Xian reported 155 new local cases for Dec. 29, official data showed. That takes its number of local infections to more than 1,100 since the flare-up began on Dec. 9 and compelled authorities to put the city of 13 million under lockdown.

Despite the low case count compared with clusters in many cities around the world, Xian officials have imposed tough curbs on travel within and out of the city since Dec. 23, as Beijing demands each outbreak be contained quickly.

"Xian has reached a live-or-die stage in its fight against the virus," Zhang Fenghu, a city government official, told a news conference on Wednesday.

Samsung Electronics (005930.KS) and Micron Technology (MU.O), two of the world's largest memory-chip makers, have warned that the lockdown could affect their chip manufacturing bases in the area. [read more](#)

Xian is also a major tourism destination, drawing visitors to its collection of terracotta warriors buried with China's first emperor more than 2,000 years ago.

Authorities have embarked on multiple rounds of citywide testing to trace transmissions. A sixth round began on Thursday, a day after a fifth round.

Many residents have been barred from leaving their housing compounds unless going out to take COVID-19 tests or attend to essential matters approved by authorities.

The Xian police have dispatched personnel to each residential compound to make sure COVID curbs are properly implemented, a police official told a news briefing on Thursday.

The restrictions have curtailed access to daily necessities, with many people unable to go out to shop, leaving them dependent on deliveries.

But the curbs have caused a staffing crunch at companies involved in ensuring the delivery of supplies and the government was working on resolving the issue, a Xian government



A worker prepares food supplies to be delivered to residents of a residential compound under lockdown, outside the compound following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Xian, Shaanxi province, China December 29, 2021. [cnsphoto via REUTERS](#)

official said on Wednesday.

WUHAN ANNIVERSARY

A Xian resident surnamed He told Reuters she tried to order groceries on the online app of Alibaba-backed supermarket chain Freshippo but could not secure many items including potatoes and cucumber.

The app posted a message under many items saying: "Delivery staffers are not available", according to a screenshot He provided.

Several city districts have arranged for the delivery of free groceries to some residential compounds, state media said.

The total supply of necessities in Xian was sufficient, a spokesperson at the commerce ministry told reporters.

The Xian lockdown, now in its eighth day, coincides with the second anniversary of early signs of the coronavirus outbreak in the central city of Wuhan.

Wuhan health authorities said in a notice issued on Dec. 30, 2019, that some pneu-

monia patients were stricken by an illness of an "an unknown cause," according to state media.

Also on Thursday, thousands of people left messages on the social media account of the late COVID-19 whistleblower Li Wenliang on the anniversary of the day - also Dec. 30, 2019 - that he learned of the possibility of a pneumonia-causing virus in Wuhan. [read more](#)

As of Wednesday, mainland China had



reported 101,890 confirmed coronavirus cases, including both local and imported ones, with a death toll of 4,636.



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LOCAL NEWS

Samsung, Micron warn Xian lockdown may disrupt memory chip manufacturing

Dec 30 (Reuters) - Samsung Electronics (005930.KS) and Micron Technology (MU.O), two of the world's largest memory chip makers, warned that strict COVID-19 curbs in the Chinese city of Xian could disrupt their chip manufacturing bases in the area.

The lockdown in the city puts further pressure on global supply chains and adds to a torturous year for exporters facing sharply higher freight costs even as prices for raw materials including semiconductors skyrocket amid the two-year long pandemic.

The curbs could cause delays in the supply of DRAM memory chips, widely used in data centres, Micron said on Wednesday.

The stringent restrictions, which went into effect earlier this month, may be increasingly difficult to mitigate and have resulted in thinner staffing levels at the manufacturing site, Micron added.

Samsung Electronics also said on Wednesday that it would temporarily adjust operations at its Xian manufacturing facilities for NAND flash memory chips, used for data storage in data centres, smartphones and other tech gadgets.

Samsung's Xian semiconductor facility is currently operating normally, Chinese media group Yicai reported on Thursday. Analysis provider TrendForce also said Samsung's Xian plant is manufacturing without significant disruptions for now and supply of raw materials seems sufficient, but there may be a slight decline in output if the pandemic is not controlled.

"The impact on global supply is controllable, though there are uncertainties," said Yan Chengyin, consultant and manager at Beijing-based Bayes Consulting.

"The uncertainty is how soon the spread of the virus can be stopped and factories can return to work as normal. In our experience, clusters of cases will be under control very soon in China. Also I think the local government will try to support large foreign companies like Samsung"

Seoul-based analysts said chips made in Samsung's Xian NAND plant mainly go to China with limited shipments heading overseas. Some of the biggest demand for the kind of chips made in the plant come from Chinese server companies, they added. TrendForce said on that smartphone and



Workers in protective suits stand at an entrance to a university's residential area under lockdown following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Xian, Shaanxi province, China December 20, 2021. China Daily via REUTERS/File Photo

notebook computer makers may be directly impacted by any changes in operations at the Xian production base, but noted that Samsung's relatively high inventory level can supply buyers without any snags in the short run.

Chinese officials have imposed tough curbs on travel within and leaving Xian from Dec. 23, in line with Beijing's drive to immediately contain outbreaks as they appear.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Xian is the biggest seen by any Chinese city this year, with over 1,100 cases in total during the latest flare-up.

"We are tapping our global supply chain, including our subcontractor partners, to help service our customers for these DRAM products," Micron said in a

blog post.

"We project that these efforts will allow us to meet most of our customer demand, however there may be some near-term delays as we activate our network," the company said.

Micron added that it was working to minimize the risk of virus transmission and had employed measures including physical distancing and on-site testing and was encouraging vaccination.

Samsung's memory chip operation in Xian is one of the largest foreign projects in China. The tech giant has two production lines in Xian making advanced NAND Flash products, which account for 42.5% of its total NAND flash memory production capacity and 15.3% of the overall global output capacity, according to TrendForce.

Editor's Choice



Medical specialists treat a patient suffering from the coronavirus at the intensive care unit (ICU) of the City Clinical Hospital named after S.Botkin in Oryol, Russia. REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov



People wait in long lines at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for coronavirus testing and vaccines, as the Omicron variant continues to spread in Indianapolis, Indiana. REUTERS/Cheney Orr



A woman stands behind a car with shattered glass near the scene of a shooting at the Boise Towne Square shopping mall in Boise, Idaho. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton



Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba walks in front of the casket containing the body of Archbishop Desmond Tutu during arrival at St Georges cathedral for his lying in state, in Cape Town, South Africa. REUTERS/Sumaya Hisham



Jeffrey Epstein associate Ghislaine Maxwell sits as the guilty verdict in her sex abuse trial is read in a courtroom sketch in New York City. REUTERS/Jane Rosenberg



A child plays during a fumigation drive conducted by the municipal corporation as dengue cases surge in New Delhi, India. REUTERS/Anushree Fadnavis

Southern Daily Make Today Different

BUSINESS



Omicron Invades All The Countries Of The World!



A Poster For The Movie, "Godzilla," In 1954.

Historical Point

As strange as it may seem, the storyline of the science fiction movie thriller "Godzilla" in 1954 about a monster that rises unexpectedly out of the Sea of Japan and threatens the survival of humanity closely draws an eerie parallel to the rapid movement of the Omicron Covid-19 variant into the U.S. in 2021-2022 that also promises more illness and death to a country that is already struggling with the tragic loss of more than 800,000 of its citizens to the Covid-19 virus.

Omicron Variant Presents Many New Challenges In A Global COVID Fight

Updates - Omicron Attacks The Globe



People wait in line to get tested for COVID-19.

COVID-19 at a mobile testing site in Times Square on Friday, Dec. 17, 2021, in New York City.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

(CNN)With the Delta and Omicron coronavirus variants spreading across the nation as the new year approaches, health experts are urging Americans to get vaccinated or boosted to protect themselves and others before they face greater chances of infection.

As the virus spreads, more cities are adding restrictions, including New York and Washington, DC. Mayor Muriel Bowser of Washington, DC announced an indoor mask mandate for the District will be reinstated starting at 6 a.m. Tuesday, December 21 through January 31.

The announcement comes as DC has been experiencing its highest daily coronavirus case count since the start of the pandemic.

Bowser also said she plans to reinstate the District's state of emergency and announced a six-part action plan to limit the spread of the coronavirus. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said Monday the city is testing "more people than ever" for Covid-19 and city officials are working with federal officials and the private sector to get more testing supplies.

De Blasio also spoke about the annual New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square.

People walk by groups of people lined-up to get tested for Covid-19 in Times Square on Dec. 5, 2021 in New York City.

With the newly discovered omicron strain of Covid, health officials are urging people to get a vaccination or a booster and get tested for Covid.

Currently, the outdoor event is still scheduled to go on and all guests must be fully-vaccinated to attend. However, de Blasio said city officials are reviewing plans for the event in light of Omicron and said if plans need to be modified in any way, the announcement will come sometime this week before Christmas.

Experts discuss what's next Dr. Francis Collins, the outgoing director of the National Institutes of Health, told CNN's Anderson Cooper on Friday that the Omicron variant could result in as many as a million new cases a day. Collins suggested the impact of that level of spread on an already stressed health care system remains uncertain.

"The big question is, are those million cases going to be sick enough to need health care and especially hospitalization?" Collins said on CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday, his last day as NIH director. Covid-19 hospitalizations trended upward over

the past month as medical facilities in some parts of the country have been inundated with patients infected with the Delta variant. Now, the presence of Omicron - which scientists believe to be more contagious though most cases so far appear to be mild - may push some strained health care systems to the brink.

People wait in line for Covid-19 tests in Brooklyn, New York, on December 17, 2021.

"It is quite likely that we are going to see in some sections of the country, a significant stress on the hospital system as well as on the health care workers who are getting exhausted by all of this," Dr. Anthony Fauci told ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, noting that a more transmissible form of Covid-19, such as Omicron, will have a greater impact on the tens of millions of Americans who have not been vaccinated.

Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has said traveling and gathering for Christmas and New Year's can be done safely among those who are inoculated, and getting booster shots into the arms of vaccinated Americans remains paramount to increase antibody response.

"If we're going to deal with Omicron successfully, vaccinated people need to get boosted," Fauci told NBC on Sunday.

Recent data are demonstrating the potential dangers of remaining unvaccinated, including a 10-times greater risk of testing positive and 20-times greater risk of dying from Covid-19 than those vaccinated and boosted, according to US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data through October.

Melva Mlambo, right, and Puseletso Lesofi, both medical scientists prepare to sequence COVID-19 omicron samples at the Ndlovu Research Center in Elandsdoorn, South Africa Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021.

President Joe Biden met with his Covid-19 response team last Monday and addressed the nation Tuesday afternoon regarding the latest developments with Omicron. He issued another "stark warning of what the winter will look like for Americans who choose to remain unvaccinated."

The president said that the threat of Omicron is a "critical moment" that will define "who we are." Among the government's responses, he said, will be the addition of 10,000 new vaccination sites and hundreds of vaccinators. He also additionally mentioned that the military will be used in some instances to shore up local hospitals, more at-home Covid tests will be made available to the public and the National Response Center will have more support staff added.

Omicron will lead to a spike in cases in the upcoming weeks, but those who are vaccinated and unvaccinated will have a "stark difference" in experience, US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy told anchor Tony Dokoupil on "CBS Mornings" Monday.

"In the coming weeks we are going to see a spike in cases. And that's because Omicron is incredibly transmissible, and you know, we have to be pre-

pared for that," Murthy said. "But there will be a stark difference between the experience of those who are vaccinated and boosted versus those who are unvaccinated."

People who have maximum protection from vaccines and boosters either won't get an infection, or if they do, it will most likely be mild, said Murthy.

States responding to outbreaks Omicron has been identified in at least 47 US states as of Monday, according to public statements from hospital systems and state officials in their respective states, as well as Puerto Rico and Washington, DC. And with Delta still present, cases in some areas are rising.

New York - which was among the hardest-hit states at the beginning of the pandemic - set a new record for single-day Covid-19 cases for a fourth consecutive day Monday, according to Gov. Kathy Hochul.

There's generally about a three-week lag behind Covid-19 case trends and hospitalizations, according to a CNN Health analysis, but officials are hopeful the state will be in a more favorable position than last year.

"This is not March of 2020, we are not defenseless," Hochul said. "We have the tools to protect ourselves and the vulnerable ones in our families: Get vaccinated, get the booster and wear a mask when indoors or in large gatherings. Don't take a chance during the winter surge."

A woman wears a face mask as she crosses Westminster Bridge in London, Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced tighter restrictions to stem the spread of the omicron variant. He is again urging people to work from home and mandating COVID-19 passes to get into nightclubs and large events.

New Jersey just hit its highest daily positive case count in nearly a year with 6,533 positive PCR tests, according to Gov. Phil Murphy and Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli; the statewide percent-positivity rate is 12.11%. Still, the governor said hospitalizations are not growing at the same rate as cases. The state reported Monday that there were 1,902 people currently hospitalized with Covid-19, far fewer than peak in April 2020 when there were 8,270 reported Covid hospitalizations.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu told CNN's "State of the Union" Sunday that the state has been preparing for a winter surge and hopes to combat Covid-19 spread with measures including state-issued at-home testing and flexing beds within hospitals. Bringing in health care workers from other states has been key as well, Sununu said.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan predicted that the state will see "probably the worst surge we've seen in our hospitals throughout the entire crisis" over the next three to five weeks, telling "Fox News Sunday" that officials are "trying to do everything we can to get the last 9.2% of our population vaccinated."

On Monday, Hogan announced in a tweet that he has tested positive for Covid-19. Hogan, who is vaccinated and has received a booster shot, said the test was part of his regular testing routine. The

Republican governor's announcement follows a string of lawmakers who have been fully vaccinated and boosted and tested positive for Covid-19.

Schools and sports are making changes While the conversation surrounding Covid-19 may shift depending on whether hospitalizations spike or plateau in the coming weeks, some universities and sports leagues are already working to curtail a possible spread.



A woman is tested for COVID-19 at the Lenasia South Hospital, near Johannesburg, South Africa, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. South African doctors say the rapid increase in COVID-19 cases attributed to the new omicron variant is resulting in mostly mild symptoms.

(Photo/SHIRAZ MOHAMED, AP) Citing the "uncertainty" around the Omicron variant, Stanford University announced it is shifting to online instruction for the first two weeks of the upcoming winter quarter, slated to begin January 3.

Harvard University is also moving to remote learning for the first three weeks of January classes, stating in an open letter that the move was "prompted by the rapid rise in Covid-19 cases locally and across the country, as well as the growing presence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant."

The growing number of Covid-19 cases have forced postponements in several major sports leagues. Seven NHL teams have been temporarily shut down as of Sunday, and the league and its players' union announced that games through Christmas that required cross-border travel between the US and Canada will be postponed.

Five NBA games have been postponed as several teams in the league have numerous players under Covid-19 health and safety protocols. More than a dozen games in NCAA men's basketball have been canceled or postponed.

A flight crew from Air China arrived in hazmat suits in the international terminal at Los Angeles International Airport on December 3, 2021, as Los Angeles County reported its first case of the new Covid-19 variant, omicron.

(Photo/FREDERIC J. BROWN, AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

And the NFL delayed three of its Sunday games and updated its Covid-19 testing procedures, which will no longer call for testing of asymptomatic, fully vaccinated players, coaches and other staff with close contact to players. All individuals will be screened for Covid-19 symptoms prior to entering team facilities, according to a copy of the protocols obtained by CNN.

(Article Continues Below)

Southern Daily Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Omicron Invades All The Countries Of The World!



A Poster For The Movie, "Godzilla," In 1954.

Modern: Data suggests larger booster dose increases antibodies

Biotechnology company Moderna announced Monday that preliminary data suggests its half-dose booster shot increased antibody levels against Omicron compared with the levels seen when a fully vaccinated person does not receive a booster - but a larger-sized dose of the booster increases antibody levels even more.

Currently, Moderna's booster is administered as a 50-microgram dose. The company announcement noted that its 50-microgram booster dose increased antibody levels 37-fold and a 100-microgram booster dose increased antibody levels 83-fold compared with levels seen before a booster.

It remains unclear what these increases mean as far as how well the booster doses clinically work against Omicron.

"The dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases from the Omicron variant is concerning to all. However, these data showing that the currently authorized Moderna COVID-19 booster can boost neutralizing antibody levels 37-fold higher than pre-boost levels are reassuring," Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel said in the company's announcement.

Fauci Says Americans Should Brace For A 'Tough Few Weeks Or Months' - Omicron 'Is Going To Take Over' This Winter

Dr. Anthony Fauci says, straining a health care system already battered by the Delta variant.

"It's going to take over," Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said of the Omicron variant on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday, urging Americans to get vaccinated and get their booster

shots. "And be prudent in everything else you do: When you travel in your indoor settings that are congregated, wear a mask."

"We can't walk away from that, Jake, we can't," he told CNN's Jake Tapper. "Because with Omicron that we're dealing with, it is going to be a tough few weeks to months as we get deeper into the winter."

According to the World Health Organization, Omicron cases are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days with documented spread. And in the US, it's expected to become the "dominant strain" in the coming weeks, the director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday.

The US is now facing a resurgent coronavirus as the pandemic marches into its third year. The country was averaging 126,967 new cases per day as of Saturday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University - up from an average of just over 70,000 new cases per day at the beginning of November.

"This Omicron variant is extraordinarily contagious. It's as contagious as measles, and that's about the most contagious virus that we've seen," CNN medical analyst Jonathan Reiner said Saturday, warning there was a "tsunami" coming for unvaccinated Americans.

Scientists say it's still too early to tell whether Omicron causes a milder form of Covid-19. But regardless, it will put pressure on the health care system, Reiner said.

"Why would you go into that kind of battle completely unarmed?" said Reiner, a professor of medicine and surgery at George Washington University School of Medicine & Health Sciences. "Our vaccines will protect you, particularly if you are triple vaxed. People who are unvaxed should start the process now. Go ahead and go to your pharmacy and get vaccinated."

It's important to remain vigilant to help prevent hospitals from getting "swamped," he added. Even if Omicron ends up causing less severe infection than Delta, the sheer number of infections Omicron could generate could overwhelm US hospitals. More than 69,000 people are currently hospitalized with Covid-19 across the US and more than 20% of all ICU beds are occupied by Covid-19 patients, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services.

"We need to protect our health care system," Reiner said, "and that's why every American needs to mask up and vax up right now because our health care infrastructure is at stake right now."

"Do not wait" to get a booster, expert says According to CDC data, about 61.4% of the total US population is fully vaccinated, and about 32.1% of fully vaccinated adults have received a booster, which health officials point to as a crucial line of defense against the Omicron variant. And

yet many who are eligible for a booster shot have not gotten one.

The protection offered from two-dose mRNA vaccines - like those produced by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna - is "quite good particularly against severe disease," Fauci said Sunday.

"But when you get to Omicron, the protection significantly goes down," he said. "But the good news is when you boost someone, it goes right back up." Unvaccinated people face a 20 times greater risk of dying from Covid-19 and a 10 times greater risk of testing positive than fully-vaccinated people who have also received a booster, according to data recently published by the CDC. The data suggests the gap in risk between unvaccinated people and those with a booster is even larger than it is between unvaccinated people and those who are fully vaccinated with their initial series.

Face shields for sale in a pharmacy in New York City on Dec. 9, 2021.

Dr. Francis Collins, the outgoing director of the National Institutes of Health, told CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday people should not wait to get boosted.

"A big message for today is, if you've had vaccines and a booster, you're very well-protected against Omicron causing you severe disease," he said. "So anybody listening to this who is in that 60% of Americans who are eligible for a booster but haven't yet gotten one, this is the week to do it. Do not wait."

New York again tops record for daily new cases On Sunday, New York state broke its record for the highest single-day Covid-19 case count since the beginning of the pandemic for a third consecutive day. Gov. Kathy Hochul's office reported 22,478 positive cases Sunday, up from 21,908 positive Covid-19 cases Saturday.

Hochul reiterated her message to New Yorkers that despite surging numbers, they are in a far more favorable position than when the virus initially struck the Empire State last year.

"This is not March of 2020, we are not defenseless," she said in a statement Sunday. "We have the tools to protect ourselves and the vulnerable (loved) ones in our families: Get vaccinated, get the booster and wear a mask when indoors or in large gatherings. Don't take a chance during the winter surge."

Covid-19 hospitalizations across the state remained relatively low at 3,909, compared to a peak of 18,825 Covid-19 related hospitalizations on April 13, 2020, according to available data. "This is not like the beginning of the pandemic," Hochul said in a statement Saturday. "We are prepared for the winter surge because we have the tools at our disposal."

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio echoed that message in a news conference Sunday, pointing, in part, to the availability of vaccines and boosters. "We're not here to minimize the extent of the challenge - it will be very challenging," the mayor said. "But it is something that we can meet. It is something we can overcome. We have the tools, but we need everyone to get in the game."



Houston's Mayor Sylvester Turner shown getting his Covid-19 vaccination. Although vaccinated, the mayor has contracted the virus and is isolating at home.

In New York City, Covid-19 cases more than doubled from the beginning of the week on December 13 to Saturday. On Sunday de Blasio reported a seven-day average of 5,731 new cases, a number he called "a really, really shocking figure and one that will keep growing, undoubtedly."

In response, the city is also working to increase access to Covid-19 testing, the mayor said. "You'll be seeing new testing sites, you'll be seeing more at-home testing kits being made available through community organizations," he said. "All of these efforts will help to reduce the lines we're seeing at testing sites and help to make testing more available."

At one testing site in Brooklyn, resident Rich Odi or told CNN he waited two hours Sunday to get a test. He's vaccinated but has friends who've gotten Covid-19 or had scares, so he wanted to try to "play it safe for the family."

Kymoi Phillip said he similarly felt getting a test was a safe choice because "you never know who could have (a) case."

Being a student, Phillip said, he was concerned hearing of all the schools that have decided to close. "I'm afraid that my school might be getting shut down and we might go back into lockdown," adding he fears "we may be in the same predicament that were were in last year."

The surge has already affected the city's entertainment industry, forcing the cancellation of a number of Broadway shows in recent days - just months after Broadway began welcoming audiences back after an extended pandemic hiatus.

This weekend's "Saturday Night Live" had no in-studio audience and aired mostly pre-taped segments because of the rise in Covid-19 cases. The move followed the cancellation of the Radio City Rockettes' "Christmas Spectacular" shows for the rest of the year.

Hospitals are already impacted - and bracing for more

New York isn't the only state grappling with a surge in cases or anxiety about what's to come.

Maryland is bracing for what Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, on Sunday said could be the "worst surge we've seen in our hospitals throughout the entire crisis," telling "Fox News Sunday" hospitalizations are already up about 150% over the past two weeks.

California health officials said Friday they were seeing hospitalization numbers begin to trend upward, stressing the need for vaccinations and booster vaccines. In New Jersey, "we're seeing long lines outside of

our testing clinic, more demand than we've seen in many months for testing, because folks are getting sick," said Dr. Shereef Elhahad, president and CEO of University Hospital in Newark.

Hospitalizations have doubled over the past two weeks, he said, and although 46% of those hospitalized earlier this week had been vaccinated, they had not had a booster shot.

Dr. Rob Davidson, an emergency room physician in Michigan, said he's seeing a "pretty critical Delta surge right now." And while he's seeing the test positivity rate slightly decrease, Covid-19 patients are staying in the hospital for extended periods of time.

Dr. Marc Gorelick, who heads Children's Minnesota hospital, said the facility is already struggling to cope with the numbers.

"When you're on top of a surge where you're already at 90%, 95% capacity, those extra preventable Covid patients coming in are the thing that pushes the system to the brink," Gorelick said Friday.

Oregon officials are already forecasting a grim early 2022: Dr. Peter Graven, a data scientist for Oregon Health and Science University, said a surge in the state's hospitalizations could be expected by mid-January.

A year after the first vaccinations, coronavirus restrictions are back

"Combined with its heightened transmissibility, we expect Omicron will generate a large increase in the number of Oregonians that will become severely ill and likely need a hospital."

Scientists are still working to gather information on how severe the Omicron variant is.



A cyclist rides past an exhibition of white flags representing Americans who have died of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), placed over 20 acres of the National Mall, in Washington, U.S., September 17, 2021. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts/File

Data from two weeks of South African cases appeared to indicate Omicron was milder in severity. But UK epidemiologists said last week they found no evidence Omicron is causing milder disease there - although the Imperial College London team also said there was not much data to go on yet.

The CDC looked at 43 cases of Omicron and most of those people had mild symptoms, it said last week. Most were vaccinated, with about a third of the total group boosted.

"We've seen cases of Omicron among those who are both vaccinated and boosted, and we believe these cases are milder or asymptomatic because of vaccine protection. What we do know is we have the tools to protect ourselves against Covid-19. We have vaccines. We have boosters," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said Friday. (Courtesy cnn.com)