FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 11, 2021

Contact: ODH Office of Communications, 614-644-8562
The Ohio State University, Marti.Leitch@osumc.edu

<u>Omicron Variant Detected in Ohio</u>

Two Samples of B.1.1.529 Variant Detected Through Genomic Sequencing

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health has reported that the first two cases of the B.1.1.529 (Omicron) variant have been confirmed in Ohio following genomic sequencing by The Ohio State University Laboratory.

"We have known that it would only be a matter of time until a case of Omicron was detected in Ohio. The CDC believes that this variant has likely been circulating in the U.S. since November," said Ohio Department of Health Director Bruce Vanderhoff, MD, MBA. "This variant's arrival and the continued impact of the Delta variant underscore the importance of our best prevention tool, which is choosing to be vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccines, coupled with prevention measures, provide the greatest protection from severe illness resulting in hospitalization or death. If you have not yet been vaccinated, or are eligible for a booster dose, now is the time to go and get your shot."

The two Omicron cases were detected in adult males in Central Ohio, and both tested positive on a PCR test on Dec. 7. Both cases had received their initial COVID-19 vaccine series more than six months ago, but neither had yet obtained a booster. Both patients are currently experiencing mild symptoms and have not been hospitalized. Neither had a history of international travel. Although more information is being gathered, to protect patient privacy, exact age and county of residence are not being released at this time. Public health officials have already contacted the individuals are in the process of appropriate case investigation and contact tracing.

The Ohio State University Laboratory is sequencing all positive PCR tests, and during the past three weeks, has sequenced about 1,000 positive PCR tests. These two positive tests reflect about 0.2% of all tests sequenced at the OSU lab – the remainder of which were Delta.

"While the arrival of Omicron in Ohio is noteworthy, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Delta variant continues to drive cases and hospitalizations very high. As of yesterday, there were 4,422 patients in the hospital with COVID-19, a high that matches what we experienced in January of 2021 during last winter's surge," explained Dr. Vanderhoff. "The hospitalizations in this Delta surge are largely being driven by unvaccinated Ohioans. Severe illness with COVID-19 is largely preventable thanks to vaccines."

Dr. Vanderhoff added, "While we will continue to learn more about Omicron in the days to come, early reports from South Africa suggest Omicron may be more contagious and more likely to reinfect people. Naturally, there has been concern regarding whether vaccines would remain protective. The results of the early research regarding vaccines are encouraging, reinforcing the benefits of primary vaccination and timely boosters."

"If you test positive for COVID-19, how you and public health officials react should not be determined by the variant you have. Regardless of which variant may be spreading, isolation and quarantine remain key in preventing further spread of the virus." explained Dr. Vanderhoff. "If you are sick with symptoms of COVID-19, you should immediately get tested. Even if you are vaccinated, it is important to follow prevention measures to protect yourself and others and to minimize the spread of the virus."

REV. 11/12/2021

The Ohio Department of Health updates information on the proportion of variants in Ohio each Monday on the COVID-19 Variants in Ohio dashboard. Data on this dashboard lags by two weeks, and when updated on Monday, Dec. 13, the most recent two-week period reflected will be for the period ending Nov. 27, 2021, and will not include the two Omicron cases referenced above.

COVID-19 vaccines are widely available throughout the state. Many providers offer walk-in appointments, or Ohioans can schedule a vaccination appointment at gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov. Ohioans who want to learn more about the safety, efficacy, and side effects of COVID-19 vaccines should talk to their doctor, nurse, or pharmacist, or visit coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine.

<center>###</center>

For additional information on COVID-19 in Ohio, and the Omicron variant, please view the Ohio Department of Health's Dec. 9, 2021, press conference at https://youtu.be/Dx4yAvwUPs4.

About the Ohio Department of Health
The Ohio Department of Health's mission is advancing the health and well-being of all Ohioans by transforming the state's public health system through unique partnerships and funding streams; addressing the community conditions and inequities that lead to disparities in health outcomes; and implementing data-driven, evidence-based solutions.