Variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, are expected to continue to emerge. Some will emerge and disappear, and others will emerge and continue to spread and may replace previous variants. Scientists monitor all variants but may classify certain ones as **Variants of Concern**, **Variants of Interest**, or **Variants Being Monitored**, based on how easily they spread, how severe their symptoms are, and how they are treated.

**Variant of Concern (VOC)** – a variant that for which there is evidence of an increase in **transmissibility**, **more severe disease** (e.g., increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.

Currently, the **Delta variant** is the only variant classified as a **Variant of Concern (VOC)** in the United States.

**Variant of Interest (VOI)** – a variant with specific genetic markers that have been associated with changes to receptor binding, reduced neutralization by antibodies generated against previous infection or vaccination, reduced efficacy of treatments, potential diagnostic impact, or predicted increase in transmissibility or disease severity.

Currently there are no **Variants of Interest** in the United States.

**Variants Being Monitored (VBM)** – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention monitors all variants circulating in the United States. The variants designated as Variants Being Monitored include variants for which there are data indicating a potential or clear impact on approved or authorized medical countermeasures or that has been associated with more severe disease or increased transmission but are no longer detected or are circulating at very low levels in the United States, and as such, do not pose a significant and imminent risk to public health in the United States.

There are currently 10 variants that fit this category: [Variants Being Monitored in the U.S.](#)
**Policy Updates**
No new policy updates this week.

**COVID-19 Virus Transmission Levels**

**Community Levels**

Transmission rates across Hampden County continue to decline, although the county is still reported as **HIGH**. Data published by [CDC Data Tracker](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/monitoring-transmission.html) indicates another drop in positivity rates for the county for the second week in a row. **Hampden county is currently reported to be at 3.99%**.

**WNE Campus Levels**

Positive cases reported by WNE remain low, and there are no reported issues with isolation or quarantine housing. Link: [WNE COVID-19 Dashboard](https://wne.campus.com/covid-19-dashboard/).

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**Booster Shot FAQs**

**Why do I need a booster?**

While the COVID-19 vaccines continue to be remarkably effective in reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death, even against the widely circulating Delta variant, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said the protection provided by the vaccine could wane over time, especially among those at higher risk or who were vaccinated during earlier phases of the vaccination rollout. For that reason, a booster shot is needed to maximize vaccine-induced protection and prolong its durability. Certain individuals who received two doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at least six months ago are eligible for a booster dose, including everyone over age 65 and people age 18-64 with underlying health conditions, and people aged 18-64 years who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of their occupational or institutional setting.

**Am I fully vaccinated without a booster?**

Yes. According to current CDC guidance, individuals who have completed a primary series of vaccine—either one shot of Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) or two shots of Pfizer or Moderna—and are more than 2 weeks after completion, are still considered fully vaccinated.
Who is eligible to get a booster?

Individuals who are immunocompromised due to health conditions have been eligible for a booster dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine since August 13, 2021.

The following individuals are now eligible for a booster dose of Pfizer six months after their second shot:

- People 65 years and older
- Residents of long-term care settings
- People aged 50–64 years with underlying medical conditions
- People aged 18–49 years with underlying medical conditions
- People aged 18-64 years who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of their occupational or institutional setting

COVID-19 Booster Planning at WNE

Health Services is actively working with the MA DPH Vaccine Unit in planning booster clinics on the WNE campus. As part of those planning efforts, we are asking faculty, staff, and students to complete a short survey so Health Services can gauge the level of interest across campus. Please complete the short survey using the link noted below. You can use your WNE or personal email account to respond to the survey. Please complete the survey by Friday October 15, 2021 if possible.

Survey Link:  WNE COVID-19 Booster Planning Survey

If you have questions or concerns about this weekly update, contact Health Services at Healthservices@wne.edu or 413-782-1211.

Respectfully,

Basil A. Stewart  
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Chair, Emergency Management Response Team (EMRT)

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