

STATETIMES

SUNDAY

Your Companion for a Funday

Coronavirus symptoms: Signs you most likely have Omicron and not regular cold

COVID's Omicron variant has sent alarming shock waves across countries. In India, with 12 fresh cases of the new variant, the tally has gone up to 73 today. As per the World Health Organization (WHO), 77 countries have now reported cases of Omicron. Experts believe that Omicron may be in most countries even if it has not been identified yet.

Amid growing concerns, doctors and experts have also listed down a number of symptoms associated with the new variant, for people to not only self-examine themselves, but to also take preventive measures to curb the spread.

Omicron is less likely to cause classic COVID symptoms

It has come to light that the new coronavirus variant Omicron is less likely to cause classic COVID-19 symptoms.

Earlier, Dr Angelique Coetzee, Chairperson of the South African Medical Association, said that the patients being diagnosed with the Omicron have shown no signs of loss of smell and/or taste. Additionally, among the infected Omicron patients, there have been no cases of a stuffy, clogged nose, or a very high temperature. Professor Tim Spector, head of UK's ZOE Covid study app, also highlighted that symptoms like fever, cough and loss of smell are now in the "minority of symptoms". "Most people don't have classic symptoms," he said.

Symptoms of Omicron may resemble a common cold

Omicron variant has been associated with mild infections, which has resulted in a number of symptoms akin to common cold.

Having headaches, a sore throat, a runny nose, feeling fatigued and frequent sneezing may all feel like a usual cold or a flu. However, Professor Spector urges everyone with these symptoms to get themselves tested immediately.

Amid increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases in England, he says, "In London, where Covid is increasing rapidly, it's far more likely to be Covid than it is to be a cold. We're seeing doubling in the numbers equivalent to what's being seen elsewhere, every two-and-a-half days, and that really means numbers are going up."



In India too, common cold cases have surged due to the cold winters. However, the simultaneous rise in the number of COVID-19 cases in the country, may mean that your cold symptoms are more serious than what it seems.

What to do next?

The best way to determine whether you have a common cold, flu or COVID-19 is

through an RT-PCR test. Professor Spector recommends anyone who has developed cold symptoms to get themselves tested for COVID-19, so as to curb the spread of the virus. It is also advisable to stay home until and unless you know what you're suffering from. Self-quarantine is the next preventive step to safeguard people around you.

Mild infections on the rise, but severe illnesses are a possibility too

Just because the Omicron variant is said to be 'mild', doesn't mean you let your guard down. Latest WHO report suggests that the new COVID variant is spreading at an unprecedented rate. According to WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, "the reality is that Omicron is probably in most countries, even if it hasn't been detected yet."

"Omicron is spreading at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant," he added. Although most cases of Omicron have been mild so far, the UK reported it's first Omicron death on Monday, which is why the new variant should not be undermined in any way.

Unvaccinated individuals remain to be at risk of 'intense' symptoms

In a recent interview, the South Africa Doctor, Angelique Coetzee said that unvaccinated patients are likely to experience more 'intense' symptoms as compared to those who have been vaccinated.

As is known, COVID-19 vaccines may not protect you from contracting the virus, but experts believe it can prevent severe illnesses. Although the heavily mutated Omicron variant is said to evade vaccine immunity, it is the only way we can stay safe from COVID-associated complications.

Do not let your guard down yet

Omicron variant has been associated with 'mild' infections so far. However, that's no excuse for letting your guard down. Continue following COVID-appropriate behaviour, wear your masks, maintain social distance and avoid social gatherings and crowded areas. The holiday season may be at our doors, but so is the virus.

9 ways of protecting your child’s mental health in face of COVID's Omicron variant



Children's mental health has become a serious concern during this pandemic, due to a variety of reasons including social isolation, on-line classes instead of regular school, extended screen time and parental fatigue. Parents, also have been found to be emotionally unavailable to their children; stressed after a long day's work cramped at home and with little social interaction.

Not too long ago, the world was faced with the delta variant and now before the year comes to a close, a newer and potentially more transmissible mutated coronavirus called Omicron has become a common name. The world seems to be facing constant challenges with the changing phases of the Covid 19 virus. The scientific community is working overtime to understand the various intricacies of the new variant. Most of us hope for a 'return to life' as we know it, instead of adapting to the way things are. As we continue to deal with this dynamic outbreak, learning to cope with our new reality is now necessary.

Here are a few things parents and care givers can do to benefit a child's mental health:

Limit Screen Time

While enforcing this might not make you your child's favourite parent, countless studies have proven that extended screen time has many negative effects, including; Increase in stress, social anxiety, isolation, physical fatigue and eye strain. It is vital for people of all ages to take care of the amount of time they spend on electronic devices, especially before bed. It is advisable to switch off all electronics at least an hour before bed and spend some time to let your mind and body unwind. Doing activities such as reading or meditating before bed has shown to bring drastic improvements in sleep quality.

Mixed Topic Discussions

In the times we live in, all news sources and media that we see every day has been centered around one subject. "The Pandemic". It is always important to stay informed, especially regarding public health and safety, but the cost of catching the latest updates on what's been going on in the world might just be missing out on spending quality time with the ones you love. Children, at times, require time and attention of their parents to engage in topics that may not interest parents as much. Talking about things outside of variants and lockdowns will allow some form of normalcy to thrive in your household, and will improve relationships within your family. Discuss movies, sports and be mindful that what you discuss is interesting to the whole group. Be willing to listen, too.

Be Calm

As parents, your children will always look to you for safety and comfort. You are their primary care-givers and role models, and staying calm in a chaotic environment is incredibly crucial to a healthy lifestyle. Caution is advised, panic is not. Increases in stress result in a weakened immune system, as well as other health risks.

Fitness & Physical Activities

A key way to reduce stress and help your mind is some form of exercise. When staying physically active, your brain produces feel-good chemicals that positively affect your mood. This is a basic human reaction and the reason why many people report a "runner's high" after a healthy jog. Your brain will reward you for keeping its body healthy. Yoga is a great activity that requires very little space and will work on your entire body, promoting relaxation and also strengthening the immune system. Staying physically fit as a family will allow you to bond together. It's a great idea sharing an activity for all family members to participate in.

Meditation

Meditation is a lot simpler than most people think, and the fear prevents many from trying it at all, similar to joining a gym. Countless medical studies have shown that meditation has several health benefits, the most useful being, reducing anxiety and promoting relaxation. People who regularly meditated, had much lower stress levels and were reported to feel happier and more peaceful than those who didn't. Start by taking 5-10 minutes out of your day, and consistently practice. Meditation can be done by anyone of suitable age and is extremely beneficial to students who are dealing with studies as well as the restrictions caused by COVID.

Plan Your Days

Help your kids structure their days. One of the biggest adverse effects of the pandemic has been schedules being changed, holidays being altered and plans being cancelled. Start taking charge of your day by adapting to this new way of life. Begin by following a routine of set tasks, having a mix of activities, allotting kids play time as well as work time, and have a routine yourself too.

Do not allow your work to burn you out, make time for family activities that everyone can participate and enjoy themselves in. A structured day will allow everyone to



be more productive.

Talk to Family and Friends

Many times, in an effort to rid ourselves from boredom, we may send time with our loved ones by watching a movie or playing a game, but we may forget to actually communicate and converse with them. Often, we can be at our loneliest even in a room full of people, and it is vital to our well-being that any feelings we feel and thoughts we have, be openly discussed with the ones we trust. Humans are social creatures and we depend on each other for survival. It is important for us as a society to rid ourselves of the stereotype that having feelings and expressing emotions is bad. Emotional suppression can lead to many health risks and early deaths, and have a grave impact on your nervous system. Practice allowing yourself to listen to what your children really want to say without responding with advice or lectures, and express yourself in a healthy way too. Mindfulness is the exercise of being aware of the present moment and not thinking of anything related to the past or present in any way, and is a good mindset to practice when times are stressful.

Enroll in online courses

We never stop learning and growing, and the same is true for people stuck in a pandemic. We may not be physically able to go to many places, but the way in which we interact with the world must change in order for us to make the best of such a situation. Online Courses and the internet itself houses a plethora of information, and the extra time at home means that you finally have time to use it to its full advantage. Learn skills for work or pick up a new hobby, this will improve brain functions and reduce depression. Enlist your children in courses suited to their liking for them to spend their time usefully.

Why your anger could be concerning; signs you need help

Anger is an emotion. It is a way for you to express your displeasure, a form of resistance and also a means of survival. However, when your anger becomes rage and takes the form of aggression, it could do more damage than you can imagine. Being unable to control it could add to your woes, making every aspect of your life seem like a challenge.

Having said that, it is important for you to first identify whether you have any anger-related issues. Find out if you have trouble controlling it, and see if it's impacting your physical and mental health. That's when you can look for various measures, self-calming strategies and resort to anger management.

Some people may be more angry than others

Everyone gets angry. However, the intensity may vary from one person to another.

Some people get angry easily, stay grumpy and find it difficult to calm down. While there are people whose anger is an outcome of built up emotion. Some throw things, shout, yell and have a loud way of expressing their dissatisfaction. Then there are those who isolate themselves, sulk, remain grumpy for a long time, or get ill.

The patience level in people who are short tempered is really low and it often arises out of frustration. Now, there could be many reasons for it. Depending on what you've experienced in the past, your family history, if you have been subject to a traumatic experience, have dealt with loss or are grieving, your anger could be an outcome of it all.

Sometimes letting it all out is the best way to free yourself from the shackles of frustration and annoyance. But not being able to control it could be detrimental to your health as well as your mental wellbeing.

How anger management plays a crucial role?

Often, expressing your anger in a violent way is not the answer to your problems. It can be communicated in a controlled manner. Anger management helps you do that. It is a therapeutic process that helps you understand your rage better. Besides helping you identify the early signs of uncontrolled anger, it teaches you ways to resolve your issues, calm yourself down and channel that wrath into something productive. From relaxation techniques, behavioural therapies to exercises and if needed, medications, anger management consists of multiple ways to manage your anger in the right way.



When to seek intervention

Anger and aggression are two sides of the same coin. While anger is an emotion, when it takes the form of violence, it becomes aggression. Therefore, it could lead to various signs and symptoms, both emotional and physical.

Physical symptoms of anger issues include:

- High blood pressure

- Heart palpitations
- Muscle tension and tightness
- Loss of consciousness
- A tingling sensation

Emotional symptoms of anger issues include:

- Frustration
- Irritation
- Anxiety
- Reckless behavior
- Frequent arguments
- Self-isolation

Effective strategies to tame your temper

Firstly, it is important to identify your stressors. Know what's triggering your anger. Is it something to do with your past or has it only become more frequent in the recent past? Once you do that, here are some self-calming strategies to adopt.

- Breathe until you feel relaxed.
- Talk to yourself, tell yourself to 'relax', 'to calm down' and 'take it easy'!
- Running, brisk walking or any other exercise routine can help calm your nerves.
- Yoga can also help relax your muscles, release tension.
- Rather than shouting, communicate your anger in the form of productive conversation.
- Think of a solution, a way forward, rather than revisiting the factors that lead to such stressful circumstances.
- Give yourself a time-out, a break in simple terms. Distance yourself from the negative environment and surround yourself with positive energy.

You're not alone

Many people deal with anger issues. Some don't even realize it until it's too late. That said, if you think you're alone, you're wrong. Popular celebrities like Alec Baldwin, Chris Brown and Mel Gibson have been called out for having terrible rage. They have been sentenced to anger management too. But in the end, it's all about the change you want to bring unto yourself.

