

Even though Omicron appears to be peaking, booster shots are still critical. Here's why

When omicron was first identified in late November and began spreading rapidly in the United States, millions of vaccinated people lined up for the extra shots. But that uptake has slowed significantly. Most people eligible for the booster shots, estimated at more than 86 million people, have not gotten them, according to the CDC.

Surveys by private polling firms suggest that uptake might be somewhat higher, and the CDC has acknowledged its data may be an underestimate. Still, despite a growing stack of scientific studies showing an extra dose jacks up antibodies to protect against severe disease and death, far fewer Americans have embraced booster shots than did the initial vaccine series.

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[One of the new CDC reports](#) analyzed data from hundreds of thousands of emergency room visits, urgent care visits and hospitalizations between August 2021 and Jan. 5, 2022. It showed that a third dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna shots reduces the chance of hospitalization by 90 percent compared to unvaccinated people, and reduces the chance of a trip to the emergency room by 82 percent. The data covered a period that includes three weeks when omicron was the predominant variant.

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