

If Omicron is so much milder than prior COVID variants, why are hospitals packed with patients?

Omicron has filled up U.S. hospitals with more COVID-19 patients than any other surge of the pandemic. But there's been a shift in how the illness behaves since the days of delta, with many cases, even hospitalized ones, milder and quicker to treat.

As with earlier variants, COVID-19 can still be a dangerous, unforgiving disease for patients who are vulnerable either because of underlying medical problems or because they're not vaccinated. But it's also increasingly clear that omicron is less likely to inflict the same level of damage as the delta variant.

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University of Virginia critical care physician [Taison Bell](#) says omicron is milder in the same way that a hurricane can be milder than a tornado: The tornado may cut a more destructive path with high-wind speeds, but the hurricane has a much bigger footprint.

"When you have so many more people who are being affected by the storm, you are still going to end up with an overwhelmed health care system," says Bell, who's an assistant professor of medicine at UVA.

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"Nothing about this has been mild for us at all," he says. "We're still working just as hard to try to keep people alive with omicron as we were with delta."

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.**](#)