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Good morning

Over the holidays, you may have heard about Omicron XBB.1.5

It went from 4% of sequences to 40% in just a few weeks

That's a stunning increase

So what does it mean? Will it cause a wave of serious illness and death?

Here's what we know, don't know



With any new variant or subvariant,

Remember -- there are always 3 key questions we want to answer:

1. Is it more immune evasive?
2. Is it more inherently contagious?
3. Is it more virulent/dangerous

So what do we know?

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1. More immune evasive? Probably yes. More than other Omicron variants
2. More inherently contagious? May be. It binds more tightly to the human ACE receptor. Might affect contagiousness
3. Is it more dangerous: We don't know

So of course, the big question is.....

3/n

How much protection do vaccines or recent infections offer?

What we currently know:

If you had an infection before July OR

Your last vaccine was before bivalent update in September

Your protection against an XBB.1.5 infection is probably not that great

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We will soon have more data on how well vaccines neutralize XBB.1.5

But right now, for folks without a very recent infection or a bivalent vaccine

You likely have very little protection against infection

And for older folks, diminishing protection against serious illness

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The new bivalent shot is your best protection against both infection & serious illness

Another question:

How well do our tests work XBB.1.5?

All the evidence says that they should work just fine

And last but not least, how well do our treatments work?

6/n

Paxlovid and Molnupiravir (the oral pills) should work fine based on what we know

So what does this mean for the weeks ahead?

Whether we'll have an XBB.1.5 wave (and if yes, how big) will depend on many factors

Including immunity of the population, people's actions, etc

7/n

Here's what folks can do to minimize risk:

1. Make sure you are up to date on the bivalent booster (critical)
2. Test before large gatherings or before seeing someone vulnerable (I did over the holidays)
3. Wear a high-quality mask in crowded indoor spaces

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What you can do (continued)...

4. Work to improve ventilation/filtration in indoor spaces
5. If you have symptoms: test right away and avoid hanging out with high risk folks
6. If you do get Covid – immediately get evaluated for treatments. They are lifesavers.

9/n

Here is what the federal government has been doing:

1. Tracking XBB.1.5 and other variants closely
2. Providing easy access to updated COVID-19 vaccines.

Remember, they're still free!

3. Providing free, high quality masks through pharmacies, food banks, etc.

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4. Providing free tests (<http://covidtest.gov>) & making free tests available through food banks, community health centers, schools, more

- 5 Providing support for schools, businesses to improve ventilation and filtration in buildings

- 6 Ensuring access to free treatments

Together, we can keep the disruption of XBB.1.5 to a minimum

If more people get the updated vaccine

And people who are at elevated risk get treated

We can prevent most cases of serious illness

And save lives

11/12

So am I concerned about XBB.1.5? Yes

Am I worried this represents some huge set back? No

We can work together to manage the virus

And if we all do our part

We can reduce the impact it will have on our lives