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HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Why White House Covid czar Dr. Jha says he's 'not overly concerned' about rising BA.2 cases

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Jatniel Hernandez fills syringes with COVID-19 vaccine booster shots at a vaccination clinic on April 06, 2022 in San Rafael, California. Justin Sullivan | Getty Images

Covid-19 cases are rising again [in the Northeast](#), due in part to the omicron's highly contagious BA.2 subvariant — but the White House's new Covid czar isn't too worried about it just yet.



Jha, the dean of Brown University's School of Public Health, was named the [White House's Covid-19 response coordinator](#) last month. On Monday, he acknowledged the growing number of Covid cases in parts of the country: 27 states, plus Washington D.C., have experienced a jump in new cases over the past seven days, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

But, Jha said, the data doesn't point toward another full-on Covid surge because hospitalizations are currently "the lowest they have been in the entire pandemic." [According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the U.S. is currently averaging just over 1,300 hospitalizations per day, which is indeed a pandemic-era low point.

Of course, that's not a guarantee: Jha urged people to remain "careful," and watch how the subvariant evolves as it spreads. But, he said, he doesn't think "this is a moment where we have to be excessively concerned."

Some experts say the U.S. is well-suited to handle a rise in Covid cases right now because a majority of Americans currently have some level of [Covid antibodies in their systems](#). According to a [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey of blood donor samples](#), conducted in December and updated in February, an estimated 95% of Americans ages 16 and older have developed identifiable Covid antibodies.

Those come from both vaccinations — more than 77% of the U.S. population has received at least one Covid vaccine dose, [according to the CDC](#) — and prior Covid infections.

Still, the antibody statistic — while encouraging — is also no guarantee of protection against BA.2. Different types of immunity provide protection for different amounts of time, and not all Covid antibodies actively fight the virus, experts [told CNBC Make It](#) last month.



"[Covid] is not going to be eradicated, and it's not going to be eliminated," he said, adding: "[W]e're going to have to live with some degree of [the] virus in the community,"

Fauci urged people to assess their own individual risk profiles before going out in public, recommending questions like: "What is my age? What is my status? Do I have people at home who are vulnerable that, if I bring the virus home, there may be a problem?"

He added that the best way to protect yourself is to get vaccinated and, [if eligible](#), boosted.

Disclosure: NBC and CNBC are divisions of NBCUniversal.

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