



Update

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer



@galeabrewer

www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, NY, NY 10007 (212) 669-8300

431 West 125th St., Storefront, NY, NY 10027 (212) 531-1609

Please forward to a friend and ask them to subscribe! manhattanbp.nyc.gov/signup

**Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer's Newsletter for Wednesday,
December 8, 2021 Manhattan Community Board 6 Full Board Meeting**

[Full newsletter available here](#)

1) Holiday Pedestrianization of Streets Around Rockefeller Center and Radio City:

Manhattan Borough President Brewer was pleased that the Mayor heeded her and Council Member Keith Powers' call to make the streets around Rockefeller Center and Radio City Music Hall pedestrian-only during the holidays ([find street details here](#)).

Expanding pedestrian space to allow New Yorkers and tourists to finally return to this beloved holiday experience is the perfect way to welcome visitors back to our city as we reopen [Holiday Crowds Flock Back to New York City-- WSJ, paywalled](#)).

2) Manhattan Borough President Brewer Announced Results of Investigation into "Dark Stores":

On Tuesday, December 7th on the Brian Lehrer Show, Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer announced results of an investigation into the proliferation of quick-service grocery delivery apps, also known as "dark stores."

Earlier this month, staff with the office of Manhattan Borough President along with civic technology organization BetaNYC analyzed where these quick service centers are and only three in Manhattan were operating in appropriately zoned areas. Using mapping technology, the BP's office and BetaNYC found that the rest of the sites fall outside of proper zoning regulations.

This weekend, an in-person survey of these centers in Manhattan by Manhattan Borough President officials found the following:

- 19 of 22 storefronts had fully or partially covered frontage with some already covered in graffiti.
- Such storefront features actively work against a neighborhood's retail character.
- No stores offered in-store shopping as an option.
- Only 9 of 22 stores offered pick-up.
- 21 of 22 stores were not open to the public, lowering foot traffic to the particular blocks where the stores are located.
- There were at least 6 stores that stored bikes and scooters inside in close proximity to food items, creating health and sanitary concerns. These bikes and scooters add traffic to the sidewalk as they pull in and out of these dark stores. One inspector was almost knocked over by one.

"Zoning protections exist so that we have well-balanced streets, neighborhoods, and communities," said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer.

"We don't want warehouses and distribution centers next to coffee shops, daycare centers, and bookstores where these dead storefronts attract vandalism, stymie an active street life, and raise quality of life concerns."

"These so-called dark stores promise rapid delivery, but there are so many questions on what their long-term effects on our local stores and neighborhoods will be. I'm not willing to wait to find out because we know what happened with rideshare apps on our city's taxi industry. Undoubtedly, few of these stores will be around after a couple of companies corner the market – but how many local businesses will they destroy in their wake?"

"New Yorkers love their bodegas, convenience stores, and local groceries which represent the frontline of our food supply chain in communities all throughout the city, providing affordable, fresh, and healthy food. Quick-service grocery delivery apps represent a threat to their resilience and survival. These 'dark stores' are popping up quickly, and will be closing just as fast. If we don't act decisively to address this, not only will they overrun our longstanding and beloved groceries and bodegas, but also disrupt the retail and street character of our neighborhoods."

Borough President Brewer has called for oversight and regulation from City Hall, as well as technical assistance to support existing mom-and-pop groceries and bodegas. "As helpful as the Commissioners and city agencies have been to my office, the City is currently failing to prioritize oversight and enforcement on this emerging and disruptive new sector," said Brewer. "The City must step up and make sure that our bodegas have access to the same tech resources that venture capital firms already have. I'm extremely concerned about the immigrant-owned bodegas and convenience stores this sector affects and so I'm leading the fight to ensure they are supported and protected."

3) Borough President's Year-end Reception on Sunday, December 12th from 2 pm to 4 pm:

The Borough President invites everyone to join her and her staff for a year-end reception on Sunday, December 12th from 2 pm to 4 pm in the John Jay College atrium at 524 West 59th Street. There will be refreshments, music, and holiday cheer.

All are welcome-- [RSVP here](#) if you can.

Proof of vaccination and masks required.

4) Borough Board Meeting on Thursday, December 16th at 8:30 am:

Next Thursday, December 16th at 8:30 am will be Borough President Brewer's final Borough Board meeting as Borough President.

The Board will vote on [the 175 Park Avenue/Project Commodore](#) and [the 495 11th Avenue/Slaughterhouse](#) ULURPs, as well as the Central Park Exonerated Five memorial exhibit.

[Register to watch the Zoom here.](#)

5) Updated Key to NYC Vaccine Mandate for Indoor Dining and Entertainment:

On Monday, December 6th, the Mayor announced that the Key to NYC vaccine mandate for indoor dining and entertainment will now apply to kids ages 5–11 starting next Tuesday (12/14).

So there's no better opportunity to get kids' first or second dose than at the pop-up vaccine sites happening at elementary schools through 12/13, from 7:30 am – 4:30 pm.

[See the school site schedule here.](#)

Students must be accompanied by a parent or guardian, or a parent/guardian must either complete a consent form ([English](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#)) or consent by phone at the time of vaccination.

6) Additional COVID-19 Updates:

As of Thursday, December 2nd, New York City's COVID positivity rate was 2.82%, up from 2.13% the previous week.

Those interested in diving more deeply into local COVID statistics can check [the New York City Department of Health website](#) or [thecity.nyc's COVID tracker](#).

If you're traveling for the holidays, get boosted. If you're staying home, get boosted. Find a vaccine site here [Find a vaccine site here](#).

And even if you're boosted, get tested before and after holiday group gatherings. Find a testing site here [Find a testing site here](#).

On Thanksgiving Day, November 25th, South African health officials disclosed details about a robust new COVID variant—B.1.1.529—and on November 26th the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a “variant of concern” and assigned it a name: Omicron, pronounced [“AA-muh-kraan.”](#) (Variants are named for the letters of the Greek alphabet.)

On Thursday, December 2, 2021, the first Omicron case tied to New York City was announced ([a Minnesotan who attended an anime convention at the Javits Center in the previous week](#)) on the heels of a California case announced on Wednesday, December 1st, ([a traveler returning from South Africa](#)).

These cases are, in a sense, good news because they give US scientists Omicron samples to examine. But there's just not enough known about Omicron yet; not whether it's more contagious, or more deadly, or less affected by current vaccines (and thus more likely to cause breakthrough infections in those already vaccinated).

To be sure, there have been other variants that were initially concerning and yet proved to be insignificant. [It will take a week or two](#) to know for sure the most important details.

But what *is* known is concerning:

The Omicron variant has rapidly overtaken Delta as the dominant COVID strain in South African cases, which have spiked in parts of the country.

[The New York Times reported](#) that “The B.1.1.529 variant has a ‘very unusual constellation of mutations,’ with more than 30 mutations in the spike protein alone... On the ACE2 receptor—the protein that helps to create an entry point for the coronavirus to infect human cells—the new variant has 10 mutations. In comparison, the Beta variant has three, the Delta variant has two...”

[A Science magazine piece quotes](#) an evolutionary biologist at the University of Oxford. "... 'if we were looking out for mutations that do affect transmissibility, it's got all of them,' he says."

[The Financial Times reported](#) on November 30th that the CEO of Moderna, Stéphane Bancel, doesn't think the high efficacy of current vaccines will be as high for Omicron: "I think it's going to be a material drop. I just don't know how much because we need to wait for the data. But all the scientists I've talked to . . . are like, "This is not going to be good." So for now, it's just a waiting game until the scientists figure things out. But we must use the tools we DO have: vaccinations, boosters, masks, social distancing, and acting sensibly in the face of risks. We really have to raise the NYC child vaccination rate much higher than the 16% it is now.

The faster these vaccines can penetrate a large majority of domestic and overseas populations, the less room these variants have to infect vulnerable people, mutate-- perhaps in a way that evades the vaccines-- and re-spread all over again. If you went to [that anime convention at the Javits Center](#), get tested!

On December 2, 2021, the Biden administration announced [the Biden Administration announced](#) tighter travel restrictions that make more science-based sense: Every traveler to the US would be required to show a negative test within 24 hours of departure (instead of 72 hours) regardless of citizenship or vaccination status. The administration also extended the federal mask requirement on airplanes, trains, and buses through mid-March.
