



DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

LEADING HEALTH, POPULATION AND FAMILY WELFARE STORIES OF THE DAY

Monday

202101129

Post-arrival tests mandatory

Post-arrival tests mandatory for passengers from UK, South Africa, Hong Kong, other at-risk nations: Govt (The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/post-arrival-tests-mandatory-for-passengers-from-uk-south-africa-hong-kong-other-at-risk-nations-govt-343862>

It said children under 5 years of age are exempted from both pre- and post-arrival testing

Post-arrival tests mandatory for passengers from UK, South Africa, Hong Kong, other at-risk nations: Govt

The government late Sunday issued fresh international travel guidelines saying passengers from countries at risk of Covid would have to subject themselves to post-arrival testing and additional Covid protocols in the wake of new Omicron threat.

The Health Ministry issued new guidelines mentioning the following among at risk countries — countries in Europe, including UK, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Hong Kong and Israel.

In the new guidelines, the ministry said that travellers from specified countries at will need to submit their sample for post-arrival Covid-19 test at the point of arrival (self-paid).

“Such travellers will be required to wait for their test results at the arrival airport before leaving or taking a connecting flight. If tested negative they will follow, home quarantine for seven days, re-test on the 8th day of arrival in India and if negative, further self-monitor their health for next seven days. However, if such travellers are tested positive, their samples should be sent for genomic testing at INSACOG laboratory network,” the guidelines said.

The ministry said incoming passengers from at risk nations shall be managed at separate isolation facility and treated as per laid down standard protocol including contact tracing.

“The contacts of such positive cases should be kept under institutional quarantine or at home quarantine monitored strictly by the concerned state government as per laid down protocol. Travellers from countries excluding those countries at risk, will be allowed to leave the airport and shall self-monitor their health for 14 days’ post arrival. A sub-section (5 per cent of the total flight passengers) shall undergo post-arrival testing at random at the airport on arrival. The five per cent of such travellers in each flight shall be identified by the concerned airlines (preferably from different countries),” said the ministry.

It said children under 5 years of age are exempted from both pre- and post-arrival testing. However, if found symptomatic for Covid-19 on arrival or during home quarantine period, they shall undergo testing and treated as per laid down protocol.

Domestic Violence

Over 70% women in 11 states, 1 UT never told anyone about violence experienced by them: Survey(The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/over-70-women-in-11-states-1-ut-never-told-anyone-about-violence-experienced-by-them-survey-343856>

The proportion of such women was over 80 per cent in four states and one union territory

Over 70% women in 11 states, 1 UT never told anyone about violence experienced by them: Survey

Over 70 per cent women in 11 states and one union territory never sought help or told anyone about the violence experienced by them, the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) found.

According to NFHS-5, the proportion of such women was over 80 per cent in four states and one union territory—Assam (81.2 per cent), Bihar (81.8 per cent), Manipur (83.9 per cent), Sikkim (80.1 per cent), and Jammu and Kashmir (83.9 per cent).

Tripura (76 per cent), Telangana (71 per cent), West Bengal (76.3 per cent), Maharashtra (76.4 per cent), Goa (75.7 per cent), Gujarat (70.6 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh (79.7 per cent) are the other states where more than 70 per cent women never sought help or told anyone about the violence experienced by them.

Less than 10 per cent women sought help to escape from physical violence in eight states— Assam (6.6 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (7.7 per cent), Bihar (8.9 per cent), Goa (9.6 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (9.6 per cent), Jammu and Kashmir (7.1 per cent), Manipur (1.2 per cent), and Nagaland (4.8 per cent).

The sources of help for those who sought it included their own family, husband's family, neighbour, police, lawyer and religious leader.

The types of spousal violence experienced by the women were cuts, bruises, aches, eye injuries, broken bones, severe burns, broken teeth, sprains and dislocations among others. —PTI

WHO

Not yet clear if Omicron more transmissible, causes severe disease, says WHO (The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/not-yet-clear-if-omicron-more-transmissible-causes-severe-disease-says-who-344171>

There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with Omicron are different from those from other variants, the WHO says

Not yet clear if Omicron more transmissible, causes severe disease, says WHO

The World Health Organisation has said it is “not yet clear” whether the newly-detected coronavirus variant Omicron is more transmissible or causes more severe disease compared to other variants, including the highly-transmissible and globally prevalent Delta variant.

“There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with Omicron are different from those from other variants,” the WHO said.

It added that initial reported infections were among university studies - younger individuals who tend to have more mild disease - but understanding the level of severity of the Omicron variant will take days to several weeks

Amid concerns over the detection and transmissibility of B.1.1.529, designated by the WHO as a “variant of concern”, the global health organisation said on Sunday that even as researchers in South Africa and around the world are conducting studies to better understand many aspects of Omicron and will continue to share the findings of these studies as they become available, “it is not yet clear whether Omicron is more transmissible (eg more easily spreads from person to person) compared to other variants, including Delta”.

It said the number of people testing positive has risen in areas of South Africa affected by this variant, but epidemiologic studies are under way to understand if it is because of Omicron or other factors.

On the severity of disease caused by the variant, the WHO said, "It is not yet clear whether infection with Omicron causes more severe disease compared to infections with other variants, including Delta."

It noted that preliminary data suggest that there are increasing rates of hospitalisation in South Africa "but this may be due to increasing overall numbers of people becoming infected, rather than a result of specific infection with Omicron".

The WHO said all variants of Covid, including the Delta variant that is dominant worldwide, can cause severe disease or death, in particular for the most vulnerable people and thus prevention is always the key.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the Omicron variant reflects the threat of prolonged vaccine injustice. PTI

New Covid variant

Safeguards needed to check fresh outbreak (The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/editorials/new-covid-variant-343204>

DAYS after senior medical officers of the country like the AIIMS Director and the ICMR chief were quoted as saying that a third wave of Covid-19 comparable to the magnitude of the first and second waves was unlikely in the country and that no booster dose of the vaccine was required as of now, reports of a new strain of the coronavirus being detected in some African countries has triggered a fresh alarm, with the Union Health Ministry asking the states to screen and test travellers coming from the countries in which the presence of the variant had been confirmed. The report also came on a day when the Delhi High Court asked the government to clear its stand on booster doses and also referred to the conflicting debate on inoculating children.

Countries in Europe, like Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Russia, have already reported a fresh outbreak of Covid-19 because of factors like waning immunity and vaccine hesitancy, even as India has sought to resolve the row over the international acceptability of its vaccines and validity of vaccination proof while stepping up the inoculation drive. But with a substantial number yet to be covered fully, the possibility of a resurgence remains. With fully vaccinated cases also contracting the new strain, the importance of testing and tracking, along with precautionary measures, cannot be underestimated.

The apprehension also arises at a time when the country has decided to normalise international travel by mid-December. The European Union and Britain have announced curbs on air travel to countries reporting a large number of cases, prompting early and pre-emptive action. Further disruption is bound to have an adverse effect on economic activities. What the emergence of the new variant confirms is also what the country's medical experts had pointed out, that Covid, like swine flu (H1N1), would become endemic and cyclically affect the vulnerable population. Avoid letting down the guard to keep the disease at bay.

Covid-19 as threat of new variant looms

Bengaluru: Two South Africans test positive for Covid-19 as threat of new variant looms

Both quarantined, being monitored, says an official(The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/two-south-africans-test-positive-for-covid-19-as-threat-of-new-variant-loom-343496>

Bengaluru: Two South Africans test positive for Covid-19 as threat of new variant looms

Amid fears of the spread of new Covid strain 'Omicron' looming large, two South African nationals have tested positive for the coronavirus, and their samples have been sent for further tests to ascertain about the variant, a top official said on Saturday.

Both of them have been quarantined and there was no need for worry, he said.

"From (November) 1 to 26, a total of 94 people have come from South Africa, out of them two have tested positive for regular Covid-19. So people need not worry," Bengaluru Rural Deputy Commissioner K Srinivas, under whose jurisdiction Kempegowda International Airport comes, said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, both the infected persons have been quarantined, are being monitored by the authorities and their samples have been sent for further tests to ascertain the variant.

Noting that ten countries have been identified as high risk, the DC said all those coming from there are made to compulsorily undergo tests, and those tested positive are being quarantined.

As many as 584 people have arrived in Bengaluru from ten high-risk nations from November one to 26, he said.

Observing that cases of the new variants have been detected in the last one week in countries like Botswana, South Africa, Hong Kong and Israel, state Health Minister K Sudhakar earlier today said guidelines have been given to airports stating those travelling from these countries to the city have to undergo a test despite having negative Covid test report, and they will be allowed outside the airport only after testing negative.

"Even after testing negative they will have to remain at home and after seven days they will have to undergo a test once again, and after getting a negative report, one can go out," he added.
— PTI

Covid-19 variant Omicron

Top UK scientist says new Covid-19 variant Omicron not a disaster, vaccination likely to protect (The Tribune: 202101129)

‘New variant may end up causing no more than runny noses and headaches in those who have been vaccinated’

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/top-uk-scientist-says-new-covid-19-variant-omicron-not-a-disaster-vaccination-likely-to-protect-343469>

Top UK scientist says new Covid-19 variant Omicron not a disaster, vaccination likely to protect

The new potentially highly-transmissible variant of Covid-19, named Omicron by the WHO, is not a disaster as vaccines are still likely to protect against the serious disease from it, a UK scientist, who advises the government, said on Saturday.

Professor Calum Semple, a microbiologist from the UK government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), struck a note of caution on the worldwide headlines around the new B.1.1.529 variant detected in South Africa.

The UK imposed travel restrictions on six southern African countries – South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia – as health authorities said that they are investigating the “most significant variant” which could be potentially more infectious and vaccine-resistant.

“This is not a disaster, and the headlines from some of my colleagues saying ‘this is horrendous’ I think are hugely overstating the situation,” Professor Semple told the BBC.

“Immunity from vaccination is still likely to protect you from severe disease. You might get a snuffle or a headache or a filthy cold but your chance of coming into hospital, or intensive care or sadly dying are greatly diminished by the vaccine and still will be going into the future,” he said.

The new Omicron variant was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) from South Africa on Wednesday and has also been identified in Botswana, Belgium, Hong Kong and Israel.

Countries around the world are currently racing to introduce travel bans and restrictions on southern African countries in an effort to contain Omicron’s spread.

Semple said that while it may not be possible to stop the variant coming to the UK, it is still important to delay its arrival.

“If you can slow the virus coming into your country, it gives you more time for your booster campaign to get ahead of it. It also gives the scientists longer to understand more about the virus in case there is anything we really should be worrying about,” he said.

Meanwhile, a vaccine expert believes it is “extremely unlikely” that the new Omicron variant will trigger a major new wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK.

Professor Andrew Pollard, the director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said it is “too early” to be certain whether the new variant will be able to evade current vaccinations, something unlikely to be known for up to three weeks.

But he said that most of the mutations in Omicron are in the same parts of the spike protein as those in the other variants that have emerged.

“At least from a speculative point of view, we have some optimism that the vaccine should still work against a new variant for serious disease, but really we need to wait several weeks to have that confirmed. It’s extremely unlikely that a reboot of a pandemic in a vaccinated population like we saw last year is going to happen,” said Professor Pollard.

England’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, told a local government panel that he remained more concerned about the risks posed by existing variants, describing the Delta epidemic as “undoubtedly the principal thing we need to concern ourselves with between now and Christmas”.

“We’ve always known that new variants would crop up from time to time... but there’s an awful lot we don’t know and I think it’s probably not terribly helpful to speculate,” he said.

Sir John Bell, one of the government's most senior advisers on vaccines, said that the new variant may end up causing no more than "runny noses and headaches" in those who have been vaccinated.

Sir John, the Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford, said while the new variant might evade antibodies, it would be less likely to escape T-cells and other parts of the immune system that provide broader protection.

"You could still have a highly infectious virus that scoots around and causes lots of trouble, but causes lots of, you know, runny noses and headaches but doesn't put people into hospital. Honestly, you could live with that, I think," he said.

Meanwhile, pharmaceutical majors behind some of the key COVID-19 vaccines have expressed confidence that they will be able to rapidly adapt their jabs if the Omicron variant spreads.

Pfizer and BioNTech said they expect "to be able to develop and produce a tailor-made vaccine against that variant in approximately 100 days, subject to regulatory approval".

Moderna said it has advanced a "comprehensive strategy to anticipate new variants of concern" since early 2021 – including three levels of response if the immunity offered by its jabs wanes.

Meanwhile, Novavax added it has already started creating a COVID-19 vaccine based on the known genetic sequence of B.1.1.529 "and will have it ready to begin testing and manufacturing within the next few weeks".

It comes as the UK's official figures revealed another day of high daily coronavirus cases, with 50,091 COVID infections and 160 deaths recorded on Friday. PTI

Vaccine

EU to lift authorisation requirement for vaccine exports (The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/eu-to-lift-authorisation-requirement-for-vaccine-exports-343407>

The export authorisation mechanism will be replaced from January 1

The European Union will not renew its mandatory approval system for Covid-19 vaccine exports when it expires at the end of the year, the European Commission has said.

This means that vaccine producers will no longer have to request authorisation to export vaccines outside the EU.

The export authorisation mechanism will be replaced from January 1, with a "new monitoring mechanism that will provide the Commission with timely, company-specific, vaccine export data." The Commission said on Friday that the decision is part of the EU's effort to ensure rapid production, and wide and equitable distribution of the Covid-19 vaccines that the world urgently needs, Xinhua news agency reported.

"The EU is the biggest global provider of Covid-19 vaccines, with over 1.3 billion doses exported so far, more than half of its production," the Commission said. "The EU will also donate at least 500 million doses to the most vulnerable countries over the next few months." The 27-nation bloc has fully vaccinated 68 per cent of its population of 445 million, and has ample stocks for booster campaigns. Such campaigns have already started in several member states.

"With new outbreaks of the virus in the EU and the risk of new variants of the Covid-19 virus, there is still a need for transparency of exports of vaccines, which the EU will continue to do under the new monitoring mechanism," the Commission emphasised. IANS

Omicron variant

US imposes travel ban from eight African countries over Omicron variant (The Tribune: 202101129)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/us-imposes-travel-ban-from-eight-african-countries-over-omicron-variant-343405>

The travel restrictions do not ban flights or apply to US citizens and lawful U.S. permanent residents

The United States will bar entry to most travelers from eight southern African countries starting on Monday, after a potentially more-contagious new coronavirus variant was identified in South Africa, President Joe Biden said on Friday.

The new variant, dubbed Omicron, poses a new challenge for Biden, who has had a mixed success getting Americans vaccinated after a politically motivated pushback by 10 states. Biden also faces criticism from international health experts and foreign leaders for failing to send vaccines to poorer countries.

The travel restrictions do not ban flights or apply to US citizens and lawful US permanent residents.

No cases of Omicron were identified in the United States to date, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Friday. The agency expects that it would identify the B.1.1.529 variant quickly, if it emerges in the country.

Countries around the world rushed to suspend travel from southern Africa after the World Health Organization said Omicron was "of concern." Many of those bans kick in immediately, unlike those issued by Biden.

The restrictions apply to South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi. Most non-U.S.

citizens who have been in those countries within the prior 14 days will not be allowed into the United States.

Biden made the announcement while spending the Thanksgiving holiday weekend on the Massachusetts island of Nantucket.

"As a precautionary measure until we have more information, I am ordering additional air travel restrictions from South Africa and seven other countries," Biden said in a statement.

The president told reporters while on a walk in Nantucket that his medical team recommended the ban begin on Monday instead of immediately. A White House official told Reuters the gap was due to the procedural things that had to be done before such a ban could be put in place, including working with transportation authorities and airlines.

Airlines for America, an industry trade group, said it was "in communication with the U.S. government as specifics remain unknown at this time and there are many unanswered questions.

Amid this rapidly evolving situation, it is critical that U.S.

government decisions regarding international travel restrictions and requirements be rooted in science."

The United States could add countries to the restriction list if the variant spreads, a senior administration official said.

Delta Air Lines and United Airlines both fly to South Africa and United is set to resume nonstop flights from Newark to Cape Town on Dec. 1. Shares of both airlines closed down more than 8% Friday.

Biden called on nations meeting at the World Trade Organization next week to waive intellectual property (IP) protections for COVID-19 vaccines in the wake of the new variant.

"The news about this new variant should make clearer than ever why this pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations," Biden said in a statement.

However, the WTO meeting was postponed <https://www.reuters.com/business/wto-postpones-major-meeting-over-covid-19-concerns-sources-2021-11-26> because concerns about the

variant, sources told Reuters, potentially making the already slow and uncertain process of intellectual property waivers even more so.

Some public health experts have said the United States has not done enough to provide the first doses of vaccines overseas, particularly as it pushed forward with booster shots for its own citizens who are already vaccinated.

Earlier, top U.S. infectious disease official Dr. Anthony Fauci said the United States was rushing to gather data on the new COVID-19 variant.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul issued a COVID-19 "disaster emergency" declaration on Friday, citing increasing rates of infections and hospitalizations. She did not reference the Omicron variant.

It could take weeks for scientists to fully understand the variant's mutations. Health authorities are seeking to determine if Omicron is more transmissible or infectious than other variants and if vaccines are effective against it.

The Biden administration was holding a briefing with U.S. airlines to discuss the restrictions on Friday.

The United States only lifted the travel curbs on 33 countries including South Africa, China, much of Europe, India, Brazil, Ireland, Britain and Iran on Nov. 8, after blocking the entry of most foreign nationals who had recently been in those countries since beginning in early 2020.
– Reuters

Covid Strain (The Asian Age: 202101129)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/article/detailpage.aspx?id=15997335>

New Covid strain may bypass vaccines, says AIIMS director

'Omicron variant has potential of developing immunoescape mechanisms'

New Delhi, Nov. 28: The new Omicron variant of coronavirus has reportedly got over 30 mutations in the spike protein region, giving it the potential to develop an immunoescape mechanism and thus the efficacy of vaccines against it needs to be evaluated critically, AIIMS chief Dr Randeep Guleria has said.

The presence of spike protein facilitates a virus' entry into the host cell and is responsible for making it transmissible and causing infection.

"The new variant of coronavirus reportedly has more than 30 mutations in the spike protein region and therefore has the potential of developing immunoescape mechanisms. As most vaccines (work by) forming antibodies against the spike protein, so many mutations at the spike protein region may lead to a decreased efficacy of Covid-19 vaccines," Dr Guleria added.

In such a scenario, the efficacy of vaccines, including those in use in

THE INDIAN SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) is closely tracking the new variant of Covid-19 called B.1.1.529 and its presence has not been detected yet in the country, officials have said

India, needs to be evaluated "critically," he said.

The future course of action will depend on what further data on its transmissibility, virulence, and immunoescape shows, he said.

The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) is closely tracking the new variant of Covid-19 called B.1.1.529 and its presence has not been detected yet in the country, officials have said.

Dr Guleria emphasised the need to be very vigilant and having aggressive surveillance both for international travellers and in the region where there is a sudden increase in the number of cases.

"Also, we must ask everyone to religiously follow Covid-appropriate behav-

All govt depts kept on high alert to tackle new Covid variant: Sisodia

New Delhi, Nov. 28: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday said that all government departments are on high alert in the wake of a new Covid-19 variant and appealed to people to avoid unnecessary gatherings.

Sisodia said that government departments, especially health, have been instructed to again enhance infrastructure and other necessary facilities to tackle any possible threat of the new variant.

"Fear, concern is necessary about the new variant of Covid-19. All gov-

ernment departments are on high alert. I appeal to people to not unnecessarily mingle and to take all precautions," he said in response to a question on the sidelines of a press conference.

Delhi on Sunday recorded 32 Covid-19 cases and one death, while the positivity rate stood at 0.06 per cent, according to health department data. The national capital has recorded six deaths due to the viral disease so far this month. Four people had succumbed to Covid-19 in October and five in September. — PTI

was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) from South Africa on November 24. It has since been identified in Botswana, Belgium, Hong Kong, and Israel among other countries. — PTI

Corona Curbs (The Asian Age: 202101129)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/article/detailpage.aspx?id=15997355>

Corona curbs back in MP, C'garh

Schools ordered to run with 50% capacity, arrivals from 'at-risk' nations under lens

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, NOV. 28

Uddhav calls emergency meet

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, NOV. 28

The threat of Omicron mutant has made Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh governments re-impose corona restrictions in their states. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, on Sunday, rolled back his decision—taken on November 17—to remove all restrictions imposed after the coronavirus pandemic began in March last year, by ordering the schools to run classes with 50 per cent capacity.

He has also directed the district administrations to keep the people who visited the state from abroad on vigil for contraction of the new Covid variant.

Mr Chouhan, who reviewed the situation at a high level official meeting here, revisited his earlier order allowing the schools to run classes with 100 per cent capacity and said the classes would

Amidst the growing concerns about the new Covid-19 variant Omicron, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has called a cabinet meeting on Monday to discuss the measures to tackle the situation. The state government is likely to make the coronavirus safety guidelines stricter across the state.

The CM has asked all zonal divisional commissioners and collectors to attend the meeting, which he will address via video conferencing. In the two waves of coronavirus pan-

run with only 50 per cent capacity.

Madhya Pradesh has reported 18 fresh coronavirus positive cases in the last 24 hours, taking the tally of the cases to 7,93,129. The state has so far recorded 10,528



Uddhav Thackeray

demic so far, Maharashtra was the worst affected state in the country with the highest number of cases and deaths.

The Maharashtra government has already issued fresh Covid-related restrictions, which mandated that only fully vaccinated citizens would be

deaths.

Meanwhile, the Chhattisgarh government, on Sunday, ordered the schools to run classes with 50 per cent capacity.

Last week, the state government had allowed the schools to run classes with

allowed to access public transport in the state and for using public places including government offices, shops, malls etc. The new guidelines have also made it mandatory on all domestic travellers entering the state to be either fully vaccinated or carry an RT-PCR test report valid for 72 hours.

A penalty of ₹500 would be imposed on those who are found violating the norms and also on the conductor/driver. Vehicles owners will be charged a fine of ₹10,000 if a passenger is found violating norms inside their vehicles.

100 per cent capacity.

"The state has asked the Centre to make available the list of people who visited the state from foreign countries in the last one month," Chhattisgarh epidemic director Dr Subhash Mishra said.

Pandemic Fear (The Asian Age: 202101129)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/article/detailpage.aspx?id=15996820>



Omicron brings back pandemic fears

SCIENTISTS AND DOCTORS ARE ON ALERT AS THE GLOBAL FEAR OF ANOTHER VIRUS SURGE SEEMS APPARENT

SWATI SHARMA

THE ASIAN AGE

 The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the recently discovered B.1.1.529 strain of COVID-19, first detected in South Africa on 24 November, to be a 'variant of concern'. The WHO has renamed the variant 'Omicron'.

The classification puts Omicron into the most-troubling category of COVID-19 variants, along with the globally dominant Delta and its weaker rivals Alpha, Beta and Gamma. In fact, Dr Gagandeep Kang, reputed microbiologist and virologist, has even stated

that the new variant could be more transmissible and may escape immunity.

With much uncertainty prevalent, this variant has certainly raised concerns across the world. Authorities even fear a wave of infections much worse than what was witnessed during the dreaded Delta wave outbreaks.

Experts from across the country share their views:

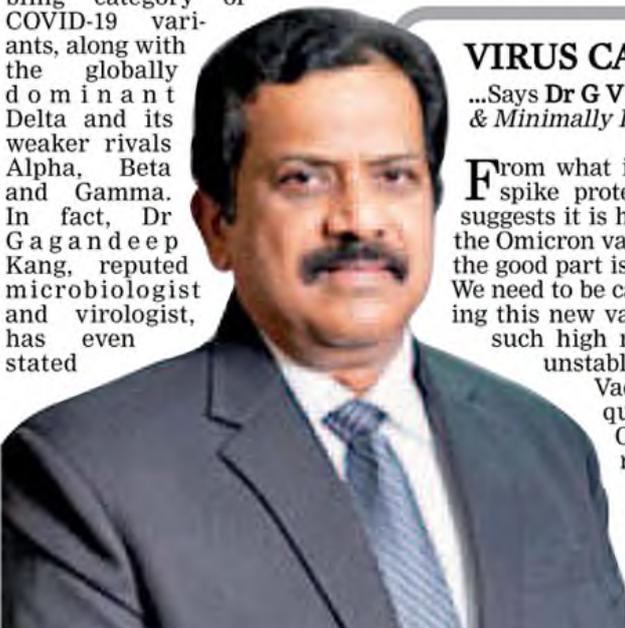
ALMOST ALL THE CASES WITH THE OMICRON VARIANT WERE FULLY VACCINATED INDIVIDUALS BUT THE GOOD PART IS THEY DIDN'T DEVELOP ANY SEVERE SYMPTOMS. WE NEED TO BE CAUTIOUS AND CONTINUE OUR VIGILANCE REGARDING THIS NEW VARIANT

VIRUS CAN'T SUSTAIN FOR LONG

...Says Dr G V Rao, Director & Chief of Gastrointestinal & Minimally Invasive Surgery at AIG Hospitals

From what is known currently, B.1.1.529 has multiple spike protein mutations, and preliminary analysis suggests it is highly infectious. Almost all the cases with the Omicron variant were fully vaccinated individuals but the good part is they didn't develop any severe symptoms. We need to be cautious and continue our vigilance regarding this new variant. There's also a silver lining — with such high number of mutations, the virus becomes unstable and can't sustain in real world for long.

Vaccination should remain a priority despite questions about effectiveness against Omicron because it is likely that they still remain protective to a certain extent. Best is to stick to the basics, i.e., keep the mask on, get fully vaccinated, maintain COVID appropriate behaviour. It is also advisable now to advocate for the booster especially for the venerable population.





Although the variant may demonstrate decreased efficacy to vaccines and may cause re-infections, the vaccines will protect against severe disease and ICU admission and death

THERE ARE MANY UNKNOWNNS

Dr K Subba Reddy, Sr. Consultant, Critical Care, Apollo Hospital, tells us that investigations are underway to determine the possible impact of these mutations on the capacity of the virus to transmit more efficiently, to impact vaccine effectiveness and evade immune response, and/or to cause more severe or milder disease.

It's commonly referred to as super strain by healthcare experts as it has more than 30 mutations, twice as many as delta variants. According to preliminary reports, the 32 mutations in its spike protein make it 40% less vulnerable to the vaccine as compared to the other variants.

- We don't know if it's more transmissible than Delta. We have no data on how much more transmissible it is.
- It is unknown if it causes severe disease and death.
- It is unknown if it can escape vaccine-induced and naturally acquired immunity. It is likely, however, that fully vaccinated individuals will be protected against hospitalisation, severe disease, ICU admission and death. We have yet to encounter a variant that is so-called resistant to vaccines.

OMICRON BRINGS BACK PANDEMIC FEARS



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IT'S A VARIANT OF CONCERN, BUT STILL EARLY DAYS

Dr Satyajit Rath, leading immunologist with Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, scientist from National Institute of Immunology, physician and pathologist, shares his thoughts.

A fraction of SARS-CoV-2 virus samples from COVID-19 cases are being routinely tested for the full genetic sequence. Different countries do this differently; some like the UK or South Africa do it intensively, while some like India, much less. When a particular set of differences begin to show up together in these genetic sequences, repeatedly and quickly, alarm bells ring.



What the Omicron variant teaches us is that we need sustained, long-term COVID policies, and desperately need the associated long-term investments in public health, ranging from community health outreach, to virus tracking, to publicly available and accessible critical healthcare facilities, to easy large-scale manufacture and affordable availability of vaccines and drugs. There are no cheap short-term shortcuts

because it indicates a new 'strain', or 'variant' of the virus. This is how the Omicron variant has been identified, initially in Botswana and South Africa, then in neighbouring countries, and now in Israel, Hong Kong and Belgium as traveller cases. Omicron is somewhat concerning for a number of reasons. First, it's not a descendant of the Delta variant but a 'cousin'. Second, a new variant commonly shows only a few differences in its genetic sequence, but the Omicron variant shows a large number. Third, many of these changes are in the

sequence coding for the 'spike' protein of the virus, which is the target of COVID-19 vaccines, raising the worry that the current vaccines may not protect as well against this variant. Fourth, this variant's emergence appears to coincide with a sudden spurt in case numbers in South Africa; this indicates, though not proven yet, that it may be much more transmissible than the Delta variant. The first obvious caution is that it is early days as yet, with little definitive information, and we should wait for evidence to emerge. We don't know if Omicron is 'really' as highly transmissible, though it could be, though there's no reason yet to think it causes severe illness.

Whether vaccines 'work' against a virus or strain is not a 'yes/no' issue. Vaccine-related reality is a graded matter, and not if it'll protect completely or not at all. While current vaccines may provide slightly reduced protection against it, they will likely still provide some protection. Another possibility is that an additional dose of current vaccines may be adequate. The least likely though not 'out-of-question' possibility thus far is that we might need a new-generation vaccine, which will take some time to develop, test, manufacture and deploy."

THIRD WAVE, EXPERTS DIVIDED

Experts are divided on whether there's a possibility Omicron will drive a third wave as big as the second one in India.

According to Dr Naresh Purohit, Advisor National Immunisation programme, and Dr GV Rao, the new strain may possibly cause the third wave and escalate cases.

However, Dr Subba Reddy also feels that a third wave is unlikely because of vaccinations. "Already, people have gotten infected and have immunity but numbers may increase, mortality will be less."

Dr Venkat Ramesh, Consultant Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals, says the anecdotal data suggest that it has the propensity for greater transmissibility because it has been sequenced in many cases quite rapidly, displacing Delta variant in South Africa, particularly among student communities in Pretoria and Johannesburg.



The available epidemiological and clinical evidence so far shows that it is highly infectious and is not clear that this new variant has the capability to escape the antibody present in a vaccinated or naturally recovered person.



MEANWHILE

Covishield, Covaxin produce immunity through a different antigen

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) scientist Dr Samiran Panda — who's also the head of the Epidemiology Department at the country's apex health research institute, has tweeted that Covishield and Covaxin — the vaccines India has deployed for its national programme — might hold out due to the following reason: "mRNA vaccines are directed towards spike protein & receptor interaction, so mRNA vaccines need to be tweaked around this change already observed. But not all vaccines are similar. Covishield & Covaxin produce immunity through a different antigen presentation to our system," reads Dr S Panda's tweet.

Population slowdown

Population slowdown is triumph of India's people (The Indian Express: 202101129)

● Poonam Muttreja writes: This drop is a sign of changing aspirations, especially among women, who are seeing the wisdom of having fewer children.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/population-slowdown-is-triumph-of-indias-people-7644983/>



Started as back as 1951, India's family planning programme is among the world's oldest.
(Express photo by Abhinav Saha)

When the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the findings of the fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS), documenting government data on health and family welfare issues, there were a flurry of chest-thumping declarations. Many in the media reported that India's population had "stabilised" and some even claimed that it had begun "declining".

Food and Nutrition

Top five nutrient-dense foods you must include in your daily diet (The Indian Express: 202101129)

Functional nutritionist Mugghda Pradhan lists foods to ensure peak health even after you enter your 50s

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/over-50-nutritionist-recommends-five-foods-eat-diet-healthy-7446702>

foods over 50, what to have over 50, indianexpress.com, diabetes and adults, blood sugar levels and people over 50, indianexpress, What kind of foods should you have over 50? (Source: Getty Images/Thinkstock)

Ageing is a natural process, but with it, the body's requirements change. This is why experts recommend including nutritious foods in one diet and cut away the junk.

"What you eat becomes of utmost importance," said functional nutritionist Mugghda Pradhan. "Our bodies are made of the food we eat, which means the majority of what we eat should replenish, rejuvenate and invigorate your body," she added.

ALSO READ | Nutritionist shares effective tips to overcome a weight loss plateau

Here's a list of the top five nutrient-dense foods that you could include in your diet everyday to ensure peak health even after you enter your 50s.

Bone broth

Bone broth contains a rich mix of nutrients such as collagen, glycine, gelatin, proline, glutamine and arginine. Collagen aids in keeping the skin healthy as it provides structural integrity and also helps in making the bones strong. Gelatin helps bones work smoothly without friction. It also helps over-burdened joints to function optimally as it provides building blocks that are needed to form and maintain strong bones and bone mineral density. Glutamine plays a crucial role in muscle building and maintaining good gut and immune health, liver health, brain health and improving the detoxification process. It also possesses a magical ability to heal the gut. Glycine in bone broth acts as an antidepressant and helps improve mood. Bone broth also supports healthy sleep. You can easily make bone broth at home with chicken feet, mutton trotters, or fish bones.

Eggs

eggs, Egg yolk is loaded with the rest of the essential nutrients such as healthy fats, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.(Source : Getty Images)

One of the cheapest and easily available forms of animal protein, eggs are often considered as nature's original superfood. Apart from protein, they are packed with a number of essential nutrients. While the egg white holds about 60 per cent of the high-grade animal protein, the yolk is loaded with healthy fats, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Most people fear eggs because of the fat, but there are no conclusive research papers proving that the fat and cholesterol from eggs can impact health negatively. Eggs are so versatile, they can be had for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and even as snacks when hungry.

Liver

It is one of the most naturally occurring nutrient-dense foods, and contains the highest density of vitamin A. Liver and other organ foods contain a high amount of folate, iron, vitamin B, vitamin A, and copper.

A single serving of liver is enough to meet one's daily nutritional requirements and curb the threat of nutritional deficiencies. Consuming optimum amounts of the liver is helpful in preventing age-related issues such as eye diseases, inflammation, Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, etc. It is also packed with minerals such as folic acid, iron, zinc, selenium, etc, and is beneficial for improving heart health and increasing hemoglobin levels.

Mutton, free-range chicken, seafood

Dietary proteins are the building blocks of our body. "Despite the differing schools of thought and contrasting opinions, research has proven that animal protein clocks the highest bioavailability factor, well ahead of plant proteins. This means animal proteins are the most easily assimilated and digestible form of protein for human beings," said Pradhan.

Also, there's no need to fear the fat from red meat; stearic acid in red meat can actually help lose weight since it signals the body to burn more fat. Dark chicken meat is rich in vitamin K2 and chicken skin contains collagen which is good for the body. Low mercury seafood such as pomfret, prawns is not only a good source of protein but also omega-3 fatty acids which are anti-inflammatory in nature. If you want your body to repair and heal on a daily basis then including animal protein in your diet every day is a must.

Ghee, butter, and coconut oil

nutritious food for children, healthy eating for kids, ghee, benefits of ghee, healthy food, parenting, indian express, indian express news One food which is known to be anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and antioxidant, is A2 ghee – pure desi ghee. (Source: Getty/Thinkstock)

Several studies indicate that refined vegetable oils such as canola oil, groundnut, soybean, safflower, mustard, sesame, cottonseed, palm oil, corn oil, and etc lead to pro-inflammatory conditions when consumed, said Pradhan.

“Ghee, butter, and coconut oil on the other hand are devoid of inflammatory components. These good fats help in preserving the essential cellular integrity, which is what your body needs as you age. These fats also help your skin glow, making it more supple, younger, and taut,” she said.

Diets rich in saturated fats also prevent hormonal imbalances because most hormones depend on cholesterol as their base molecule.

Organic seasonal fruits

healthy eating, healthy foods, cancer, cancer diet, healthy diet for cancer patients, fruits and vegetables in diet, health, cancer, indian express news Seasonal fruits are a must-have. (Photo: Pixabay)

Including seasonal fruits in our daily diet extends a number of health benefits to the body. They are a great source of various vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. For those of us that have sweet cravings, fruits are a perfect dessert option. They are literally nature’s candy.

“If you are afraid of fruits because of the sugar in them, don’t be. The fructose in fruits is not the same as the harmful fructose found in processed foods. The only caveat is that if you have severe diabetes and insulin resistance, then fruits might trigger elevated blood sugar responses,” she said.

Obesity

Obesity rising among children, adults in India; experts raise concern(The Indian Express: 202101129)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/obesity-among-children-adults-in-india-experts-nfhs-survey-experts-7645632/>

Healthcare experts have attributed the rise in obesity to unhealthy food choices and lack of physical activity among children and even adults

ctors are concerned because childhood obesity may lead to other morbid conditions that may develop during childhood or in the later years. (Source: Getty Images/Thinkstock)

There has been a rise in obesity among children under five years of age with 33 states and union territories registering a spike in the number of overweight children, according to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

Experts attributed the increase in obesity to lack of physical activity and unhealthy food habits.

The number of overweight children increased from 2.1 per cent in NFHS-4 to 3.4 per cent in NFHS-5.

Not just children, obesity among women and men also increased.

The percentage of overweight women rose from 20.6 per cent to 24 per cent while in men the number increased from 18.9 per cent to 22.9 per cent, according to the NFHS-5.

According to the NFHS-5, several states and union territories, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Mizoram, Tripura, Lakshadweep, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Ladakh, have registered increase in the percentage of obesity among children below five years of age in comparison to NFHS-4 conducted between 2015 and 2016.

Only Goa, Tamil Nadu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu registered a drop in the number of overweight children under five years of age, the data showed.

According to the survey data, 30 states and union territories registered a rise in obesity among women while 33 states and UTs recorded an increase in obesity among men.

Men and women were counted as obese whose body mass index was found to be over or equal to 25.0 kg/m² while children's obesity was counted in terms of weight-for-height.

Healthcare experts have attributed the rise in obesity to unhealthy food choices and lack of physical activity among children and even adults.

Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director at the Population Foundation of India, said behind the trend of increasing obesity among Indian women, men and children over the past 15 years, confirmed by NFHS-5, are rising incomes, poor dietary habits, and unhealthy life choices.

ALSO READ | 'Obesity is highly misunderstood; people usually equate food with weight gain': Dr Aparna Govil Bhasker

“Sustained economic growth over the past 15 years has led to a marked increase in people's incomes. We know that obesity among Indians goes up as they become wealthier. In 2015-16, according to NFHS-4, the proportion of overweight or obese men was five per cent among families in the lowest wealth quintile and 33 per cent in the highest wealth quintile,” she said.

“Similarly, the proportion of overweight or obese women was six per cent among families in the lowest wealth quintile and 36 per cent in the highest wealth quintile.

However, blaming rising incomes is not fair. Much has also to do with poor eating habits. The consumption of unhealthy foods (popularly termed junk foods) that are high in calories from sugar or fat and contain little dietary fibre, protein, vitamins, and minerals is known to increase as families become wealthier,” Muttreja said.

Besides these problems, a vast majority of Indians do not seem to recognise the importance of leading a healthy and active life. They tend to lead sedentary lives and lack the motivation to doing exercise of any kind including going for walks.

childhood obesity The number of overweight children increased from 2.1 per cent in NFHS-4 to 3.4 per cent in NFHS-5 (Source: Getty Images/Thinkstock)

Sadly, parents do not seem to realise the adverse consequences of these life choice decisions they make on the health and nutritional well-being of children, she added.

Dr Antaryami Dash, Head, Nutrition, Save the Children, India, said every nation is entering into a situation with double burden of malnutrition where there is a co-existence of undernutrition (stunting/wasting/underweight) and overnutrition (overweight/ obesity) at the population level. The prevalence is highest in western and industrialised countries, but gradually catching up in developing countries.

“Although current understanding of the health consequences of overweight and obesity is predominately based on adult studies, increasing evidence suggests that childhood obesity has a number of immediate, intermediate, and long-term health consequences. This is arising out of an obesogenic environment, which includes changing food systems and reduced physical activity,” Dash said.

He said although cost-effective interventions such as WHO’s ‘best buys’ have been identified, political will and implementation have so far been limited.

ALSO READ | Childhood obesity is a more serious concern than coronavirus, says Dr Chris van Tulleken

There is a need for effective programmes and policies in multiple sectors to address overnutrition, undernutrition, mobility and physical activity, he added.

Olive oil, shea butter and other natural ingredients

Olive oil, shea butter and other natural ingredients for your winter skincare routine (The Indian Express: 202101129)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/life-style/olive-oil-shea-butter-argan-oil-benefits-winter-skincare-routine-7619521/>

While all these ingredients are an excellent choice to maintain the skin during the winter season, it's also equally important to stay hydrated.

Winter Skincare, Winter Skincare tips, Winter Skincare essentials, Winter Skincare regimen

The dry winter weather can make the skin look dull.

The harsh winter weather can cause flakiness and dryness of the skin, making it look dull. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to provide the skin with the right nourishment, and keep it hydrated and protected.

As such, Kimi Jain, Head of Retail, Kimirica, shares five natural ingredients that one can add to their winter routine and keep the skin healthy and glowing!

Argan oil

Argan oil is prepared from the kernels that grow on Argan trees. Traditionally, it has been used both orally and topically to improve the health of skin, nails and hair. To fight the dryness that comes with the winter season, argan oil, with its skin-softening properties and power-packed minerals and vitamins, works like a magic potion on the skin, keeping it moisturised and soft.

ALSO READ |Do you need to wear sunscreen indoors? A dermatologist answers

Shea butter

Shea butter is made using the fats extracted from the nuts of the shea tree. "Thanks to its high concentration of fatty acids and vitamins, it is a wonder ingredient to soften and soothe dry, chapped winter skin. Apart from moisturising the skin, shea butter also has healing and anti-inflammatory properties, making it safe and effective for all skin types," she said.

Olive oil

Olive oil has antioxidant properties that prevent skin cells from potential damage. It is also rich in vitamins A, D, E, and K, which play an important role in treating different skin conditions.

Aloe vera

“The gel present in aloe vera leaves is rich in vitamins A, C, E and B12. Applying it on the skin daily during the winter season keeps it moisturised, hydrated and supple for long hours. It also produces a cooling effect that protects the skin from sunburns or rashes,” she shared.

ALSO READ | Watch: Alia Bhatt reveals her morning skincare routine

Vitamin E

To naturally support the appearance and health of the skin, vitamin E plays an important role. Vitamin E is also beneficial in reducing ultraviolet damage to the skin and even serves as an antioxidant. Even though vitamin E oil is thick and hard to spread on the skin, it serves as an excellent moisturizer for dry, patchy skin that’s usually common during the winter days.

“While all these ingredients are an excellent choice to maintain the skin during the winter season, it’s also equally important to stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water to flush out the toxins from the body, clear out acnes and reduce wrinkles. After all beauty comes from within!” she concluded

Pre-diabetes

Pre-diabetes: What is it and how do you know if you have it? (The Indian Express: 202101129)

An expert said that diabetes "doesn't develop overnight; a series of wrong health choices coupled with environmental and genetic factors predisposes us to this condition."

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/pre-diabetes-what-is-it-suggestions-tips-advice-doctor-7641370>

“According to the National Urban Diabetes survey, the estimated prevalence of prediabetes in India is 14 per cent. But, the global prevalence of diabetes is projected to increase by 51 per cent by 2045. As such, identifying and reversing pre-diabetes in young people can help reduce these numbers and ensure overall health of people world over,” said Dr Abhishtita Mudunuri, Senior Manager and Diabetologist, MFine.

ALSO READ | Six simple rules diabetics need to follow

Diabetes is a chronic disease which is related to one's lifestyle choices. But, the expert said that diabetes “doesn’t develop overnight; a series of wrong health choices coupled with environmental and genetic factors predisposes us to this condition.”

“There has been a disproportionate increase in incidence of Type 2 diabetes in children, adolescents and young people in the last decade. This has been attributed a lot to our lifestyle. Identifying prediabetes early and introducing interventions to reverse it can protect us from developing diabetes and its related complications related to it,” she told indianexpress.com.

What is prediabetes?

Prediabetes, as the name suggests, can be seen as a precursor to diabetes. It’s a state of insulin resistance in our body which, if left neglected, can progress to Type 2 diabetes.

How does this develop?

“Prolonged years of excess carbohydrate intake along with physical inactivity, sleep deprivation and even increased stress levels can work together to develop a state of insulin resistance in your body,” the expert explained.

Insulin is a sugar lowering hormone which is usually released through a cascade of reactions in response to food intake. When we follow an unhealthy lifestyle, especially a high carbohydrate diet, higher levels of insulin are released initially (Hyperinsulinemia) which over a period of time leads to a state of insulin resistance in our body .

“When all the excess carbohydrates are stored in our body in the form of triglycerides it will resist the action of insulin and taking in more carbohydrates will only worsen the situation, wherein you progress further into a state of first insulin resistance then prediabetes and then diabetes,” she explained.

Who is at risk?

Risk factors for prediabetes are influenced by genetic and environmental factors

Strong family history of diabetes

Past history of gestational diabetes

Overweight or obese individuals

People who have a sedentary lifestyle

Age

PCOS

“These are a few risk factors that can predispose you to early onset of prediabetes or diabetes. If you’re following a high carbohydrate diet with a sedentary lifestyle along with inadequate sleep and/or experience increased high stress levels – these strongly influence onset of prediabetes even if there is no genetic predisposition,” she said.

Symptoms:

Prediabetes usually manifests as :

- 1) Skin pigmentation, also known as acanthosis nigricans, which is black velvety pigmentation around the nape of the neck and armpits
- 2) Difficulty losing weight
- 3) Abdominal adiposity, increased weight circumference
- 4) Skin tags especially around the neck
- 5) Sugar cravings
- 6) Lack of energy
- 7) Feeling drowsy especially after a heavy carbohydrate meal
- 8) Chronic body pains or headache
- 9) Hormonal imbalance especially for women especially PCOS

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms you can talk to a doctor to check for prediabetes diabetes, living with diabetes, diabetes and blood pressure, high blood pressure and diabetes, diabetics, how to manage high blood pressure in diabetics, world diabetes day, indian express news

Diabetes causes damage to the small blood vessels in the body and stiffens their walls leading to high blood pressure. (Photo: Getty/Thinkstock)

How do we diagnose prediabetes?

Diagnosis is done via a blood test:

- Hba1c
- Fasting blood glucose
- 2 hours post meal glucose is checked.

Prediabetes is when

- Hba1c is between 5.7-6.4

- Fasting blood glucose between 100-125mg/dl (also called impaired fasting glucose)
- 2 hours post meal glucose 140-200mg/dl (also called impaired glucose tolerance)

Treatment options

The best approach is to focus on lifestyle changes, suggested Dr Mudunuri.

- Cutting down carbohydrates to less than 30% of the diet is one of the ways. Remember carbohydrates are not essential for diet; proteins and fats are essential .
- Practice intermittent fasting which is based on time-restricted feeding and fasting for 14-16 hours. This will induce a starvation state which will help break down fats as a source of fuel in your body and will also address the root cause of prediabetes and help reverse the state of insulin resistance.
- Physical activity is key to reversal of insulin resistance on a muscle level. Aim for at least 10000 steps, moderate intensity aerobic exercise for 45 minutes at least 3 times a week , and 20 minutes of yoga .
- Meditation and calm music are also good to deal with stressful situations.

ALSO READ |Simple health tips to manage diabetes

– Sleep is important to maintain our circadian rhythm and sleep helps to repair and rejuvenate our body. When you sleep, memory formation happens and also if you don't get adequate sleep, cortisol levels may be elevated and appetite hormones balance may get skewed. Getting <6-7 hours of sleep can influence these mechanisms causing weight gain, cravings, elevated blood glucose or sugar levels.

“Some doctors may choose to prescribe metformin (antidiabetes tablet to control blood glucose levels if there is inadequate response post lifestyle changes. So following a carbohydrate restricted diet, active lifestyle, getting adequate sleep and reducing stress levels will all help reverse a state of prediabetes and prevent progression to diabetes,” she said.

Finland's virtual museum to help people cope with Covid-19's psychological impact

“The idea of this museum is to archive the time, but also to support dealing with this very demanding period, to put words to what has happened and to allow us to share our emotions that we've all been through.”

finlandThe museum marks milestones during Finland's state of emergency in 2020 and highlights the collective experiences of people in the country. (Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Emotions)

Finland's Museum of Contemporary Emotions is an online museum that was developed to help the country's people tackle the emotional and psychological impact of the coronavirus

pandemic. But the interactive platform may just be relevant for an international audience and its digital form makes it easily accessible for people around the world.

finland The museum marks milestones during Finland's state of emergency in 2020 and highlights the collective experiences of people in the country. (Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Emotions)

Soon after the coronavirus pandemic resulted in international border closures and forced governments to declare emergencies around the world, countries began rapidly analysing ways in which this global public health crisis could be tackled. Finland went one step further by launching the 'Finland Forward' project in the spring of 2020 "to support the ability of people and society to cope with crises and to strengthen psychological resilience through communication."

ALSO READ |Release pent-up emotions with these three simple yoga techniques

One of the results of this project was the Museum of Contemporary Emotions, launched this October, which attempts to help people reflect on the emotions that were triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and to recover emotionally.

finland While the museum may have been formed with the coronavirus pandemic in mind, its purpose isn't necessarily limited to the ongoing situation, said Jenny Thuneberg, Communications Specialist at the Finnish Prime Minister's Office. (Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Emotions)

"This idea of the museum was born in spring 2020 when...we were living in a state of emergency. The purpose was to find a form of archiving the time that we were going through in Finland and globally," said Johanna Kaprio-Papageorgiou, Senior Communications Specialist at the Finnish Prime Minister's Office in an interview with indianexpress.com. "The idea of this museum is to archive the time, but also to support dealing with this very demanding period, to put words to what has happened and to allow us to share our emotions that we've all been through."

finland While not everyone experienced the pandemic in similar ways, some experiences like lockdowns, travel restrictions, restrictions on social gatherings etc, were experienced in similar ways in many countries around the world. (Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Emotions)

The museum marks milestones during Finland's state of emergency in 2020 and highlights the collective experiences of people in the country. The team behind this initiative told indianexpress.com that it is a product of examining people's feelings and emotions after WHO's declaration that coronavirus was a pandemic, by studying statistics, popular consumption patterns, search engine trends, surveys, trends online and on social media, news, behaviour etc.

ALSO READ | Easy and effective ways to take care of your mental and emotional health

Lockdowns and restrictions on movement in public spaces were implemented rapidly and suddenly in several parts of the world, including in India, with public health regulations demanding strict adherence to protocols. “There was really no time to look at what that does to us as people, what are our emotions, how we feel about it, how we cope with it. We felt that it would be quite important to dig into emotions and show people that this was quite normal and healthy and that other people felt like this,” said Tobias Wacker, Creative Director of hasan & partners, a Finnish brand management company that was the creative designer behind this museum.

finland The museum marks milestones during Finland’s state of emergency in 2020 and highlights the collective experiences of people in the country. (Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Emotions)

The brief to Wacker was very simple, he told indianexpress.com: the aim was to create a museum “that would maybe reduce the feeling of loneliness and the emotional impact of the pandemic to the citizens.”

A DW report from November 2020 indicated that analysis of data from last year shows that coronavirus infections were lower in Finland than in the rest of Europe. There were several reasons for these low infection rates, according to the report: Finland’s swift response to curb spread, its efficient tracking and tracing methods and more importantly, citizen’s trust in the Finnish government’s handling of the pandemic.

“It really allows people to reflect without anyone telling them that you are right or you are wrong or you should feel like this or that,” Wacker said of the museum. “It helps people dive into their own emotions and into the journey of last year, but also a bit on why I feel the way I do. So it is a good self-reflection tool as well.”

ALSO READ | Matters of the mind: Don’t rush to label challenges as negative

The museum draws on the theory of American psychologist Paul Ekman study of emotions where he states that there are six basic human emotions: anger, surprise, disgust, happiness, fear and sadness. Visitors are encouraged to process their own emotions and engage in self-reflection from the perspective of their experiences during the pandemic.

In many ways, the museum is a representation of the kind of discussions that have been happening in the country. “Mental health issues have been discussed significantly in Finland, especially during the pandemic. When we spoke with psychotherapists and behavioural scientists, they said one of the crucial elements of our ability to keep up with the current situation was to provide people the experience of being seen and heard. So we tried to create that kind of the people of Finland,” explained Päivi Tampere, Head of Communications at Finland’s Prime Minister’s Office.

While the impact of the pandemic on physical health has been given great importance, many governments have paid less attention to and ignored the pandemic's psychological and emotional impact on individuals and families from different socio-economic and cultural groups. "It is not characteristic of Finns to talk about feelings," said Kaprio-Papageorgiou. But that may be changing, and the museum is a reflection of this development that can be seen in Finnish society.

"Topics like diversity, mental health, equality, are extremely important, and Finland has always been a very open and equal society, which has to do with the Scandinavian state where every individual is important. But it hasn't always been that way, it's been a closed society as well," explained Wacker. "It has become very normal here to talk about emotions and one of the biggest topics to talk about is mental health."

ALSO READ | Are you emotionally intelligent enough to deal with work stress?

While not everyone experienced the pandemic in the same way, some experiences like lockdowns, travel restrictions, restrictions on social gatherings etc, were experienced in comparable ways in many countries around the world. While the museum was largely created with a Finnish audience in mind, Wacker believes that its message and concept is relatable for people elsewhere as well.

finland The museum draws on the theory of American psychologist Paul Ekman study of emotions where he states that there are six basic human emotions: anger, surprise, disgust, happiness, fear and sadness. (Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Emotions)

"It was of course made for Finland and the examples we used are (local) but the idea is very universal. The pandemic was hitting everybody in the same way," he said. "Usually things impact one country heavier than others, but many things were universal." Wacker points to experiences like remote teaching and staying at home that were witnessed in most countries.

He believes that the timing of the launch of the museum has been just right. "If we had opened last June, there wouldn't have been much to look into." The first wave of the pandemic hit the world so unexpectedly and so suddenly, that there wasn't enough scope for people to introspect on mental health and feelings. Now, with people having become more accustomed to existing alongside the everyday restrictions and challenges that the pandemic has brought, they perhaps now have an opportunity to reflect.

While the museum may have been formed with the coronavirus pandemic in mind, its purpose isn't necessarily limited to the ongoing situation, said Jenny Thuneberg, Communications Specialist at the Finnish Prime Minister's Office. "I've realised that the museum works even outside the Covid-19 situation. It's like you are talking with a friend or a therapist; a person who reflects on feelings so that they can be used in a universal way."

ALSO READ |Matters of the Mind: When things go south

Although built with Finland's residents in mind, this museum can be accessed and experienced by people around the world. In the process, the team behind the Museum of Contemporary Emotions hopes that people find the assistance that they need to help them cope. "The core idea is that it is a tool for self reflection, whenever you are willing and ready to do it," said Tampere.

Ayurvedic

Struggling with loss of taste and smell? These Ayurvedic tips can help (The Indian Express: 202101129)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/struggling-loss-taste-smell-ayurvedic-tips-7644647/>

"The good news is that you can take the help of home remedies to get your smell and taste back on track" said Dr Nitika Kohli

How can i get my taste and smell back after covid-19, how to regain taste and smell post-covid, ayurvedic ways to regain taste and smell post-covid, ayurvedic tips to regain taste and smell, indianexpressonline These Ayurvedic tips can help you regain your sense of taste and smell. (Photo: Getty/Thinkstock)

The pandemic has been an incredibly difficult period of time. Long bouts of lockdowns and masks are now a part of our everyday lives. But, for those of you who are recovering from the dreaded virus, it might be possible that you still cannot taste and smell things. Ayurvedic practitioner Dr Nitika Kohli shares in an Instagram post, "Some got their sense of taste and smell back after recovery while others are still struggling."

ALSO READ |People can 'see' flavour of foods before tasting them

She talks about the ways in which you can regain your sense of taste and smell. "The good news is that you can take the help of home remedies to get your smell and taste back on track." Check out the post here:

Read the suggestions here:

Sesame oil

The use of sesame oil in Ayurveda is abundant. Said to be highly beneficial for improving strength and digestive function, Dr Kohli suggests that you use one drop of the oil in each nostril every day for “at least a month to achieve best results.”

Ginger

Ginger is widely known to be a powerful antioxidant. Used as a flavouring agent for different cuisines, the root vegetable contains various antioxidants which are necessary to combat stress or disease. To use ginger as a method to get your taste and smell back, Dr Kohli suggests consuming a small piece of raw ginger daily at regular intervals. “The strong aroma of ginger can help enhance your sense of taste and smell.”

ALSO READ |New therapies for declining sense of smell come closer to reality

Stay hydrated

Drinking water is possibly one of the easiest lifestyle changes to incorporate into your daily routine. Along with helping your body to regulate heat and keeping your skin hydrated, water may also help to regain your sense of taste and smell. Dr Kohli says, “Drinking water regularly will ensure your body is getting rid of toxins. It keeps the body hydrated.”

Omicron variant

Scale up supplies: On Omicron variant (The Hindu: 202101129)

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/scale-up-supplies-the-hindu-editorial-on-omicron-variant-and-the-need-to-scale-up-vaccine-supply/article37742370.ece>

Vaccines must be made widely available across the world if the pandemic is to end

A new Greek tragedy has risen with the World Health Organization (WHO) designating Omicron, a SARS-CoV-2 variant, as a ‘variant of concern’ (VOC). While it took WHO several weeks to designate older VOCs such as Alpha, Beta and Delta as a VOC when they emerged, in the case of Omicron, which was first confirmed in Botswana, it moved without even waiting for reports on the variant’s increased likelihood to cause disease and whether it is denting the normal public health response. Omicron has now been confirmed in South Africa, Botswana, the U.K., Germany, Italy and travellers into the Netherlands and Israel. It reportedly has over 50 mutations, 32 of which are on the spike protein, which binds to human cells and is the preferred target for vaccines. Several of the mutations confer the virus resistance to monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) such as etesevimab, bamlanivimab, casirivimab and their combinations. Antibodies are the first line of defence against viral infection and mAbs are used in treatment. However, it is important to emphasise that every single mutation does not independently

increase virulence and combinations of them might sometimes temper, and sometimes aggravate, virus properties.

The virus has been detected in comparable numbers only in South Africa's Gauteng province, but the variant comprises over 90% of the fraction of genomes from those who tested positive there within just 10 days. Some nations have already imposed travel bans on flights from South Africa. Given that Omicron is a variant of the virus that can be detected by the PCR test, these countries, rather than imposing a ban, should have taken the more considered step of screening passengers and followed the usual protocols of isolation and treatment. India has done well so far to adhere to this system and observing caution. Detecting a variant in a country does not imply it originated there. Travel bans punish South Africa for its transparency and forthrightness in alerting the world to this variant. South Africa's number of daily infections — 2,828 on Friday — pales in comparison to daily numbers in the United States, Germany and Britain. However, a little over 10% in Africa have received one dose of a vaccine, compared with 64% in North America and 62% in Europe. The panic over the variant shifts blame away from the world's colossal failure in not making more vaccines available in Africa even as many countries roll out third doses. From day one, the science was clear cut that the pandemic cannot end unless the whole world is protected. India must scale up supplies to COVAX, the international consortium seeking to vaccinate countries with limited access, as well as coax countries with surplus stocks to do so.

ovaxin elicits immune

ovaxin elicits immune memory to virus, study finds(The Hindu: 202101129)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/covaxin-elicits-immune-memory-to-virus-study-finds/article37725322.ece>

The conclusions that can be robustly based on the study results are limited at this stage

A small study conducted on 71 individuals who received two doses of Covaxin found that the vaccine generates antibodies and easily detectable memory B cell and T cell responses in many recipients. The study has been posted on a preprint server medRxiv. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed and published in a scientific journal.

The multi-institutional research, which is led by a team of scientists from Delhi's National Institute of Immunology, found that immunological memory to the virus and the variants after full vaccination seemed to last up to six months in many individuals. The cellular immune responses in the form of memory B cells and memory T cells seen in most vaccinated people would mean that the immune system can respond swiftly and provide protection in case of a breakthrough infection.

Paxlovid

Paxlovid may be huge advancement for all coronaviruses: Gagandeep Kang(The Hindu: 202101129)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/paxlovid-may-be-huge-advancement-for-all-coronaviruses/article37598642.ece>

Treatment of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 virus to prevent death and hospitalisation got a shot in the arm when Pfizer announced via press release encouraging results of an interim analysis of a phase-2/3 trial of the antiviral drug paxlovid. The drug showed 89% efficacy in preventing hospitalisation and death in certain high-risk groups when treatment was started within five days of symptom onset. The announcement comes about a month after Merck's antiviral was found to have 50% efficacy in preventing COVID-19 death and hospitalisation.

In an email, Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore explains the significance of paxlovid antiviral for treatment, its mode of action, and the need for a combination therapy to reduce the chances of the virus developing resistance.

Mental illness

Evolution of immune mechanisms can shape genetic risk of mental illness(The Hindu: 202101129)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/evolution-of-immune-mechanisms-can-shape-genetic-risk-of-mental-illness/article37725480.ece>

How changes to our genome caused by natural selection increase the risk of mental illnesses is a deep biological issue

Evolution is a process of natural selection in which traits that improve the fitness of the organism to survive the challenges posed by its surrounding environment. However, genes have multiple effects: The very same genes that are responsible for improving an aspect of the fitness of the organism may have other contributions too, such as increasing the risk for a non-communicable disease. A paper published recently in Scientific Reports shows that this may be the case also with some severe mental illnesses, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Coronavirus

केंद्र ने राज्यों से कहा-आरटीपीसीआर जांच और निगरानी बढ़ाएं, अंतरराष्ट्रीय उड़ानों की समीक्षा होगी कोरोना:राज्य कड़े नियम लागू करें

(Hindustan: 202101129)

<https://epaper.livehindustan.com/>



बेंगलुरु में महानगर पालिका के कर्मचारी रविवार को फिर सड़क पर उतरे

और लोगों को मास्क पहनने के लिए चेताया। ● एनआई

12 से ज्यादा देशों में नए रूप से पीड़ित मरीज मिले

20 से ज्यादा देशों ने अब तक यात्रा पाबंदियां लगाईं

विदेशी यात्रियों को यात्रा का पूरा विवरण देना होगा

कोरोना के नए खतरे को देखते हुए केंद्र ने रविवार शाम नई गाइडलाइन जारी की। इसमें कहा गया है कि विदेशी यात्रियों को सफर शुरू करने से पहले अपनी 14 दिन की पूरी यात्रा का विवरण देना होगा। निगेटिव आरटीपीसीआर रिपोर्ट एयर सुविधा पोर्टल पर अपलोड करनी होगी। **ब्योरा**

टीकों को चकमा दे सकता है नया रूप: डॉ. गुलेरिया

एम्स के प्रमुख डॉ. रणदीप गुलेरिया ने रविवार को कहा कि ओमीक्रोन वेरिएंट के स्पाइक प्रोटीन क्षेत्र में 30 से अधिक परिवर्तन मिले हैं जो इसे प्रतिरक्षा तंत्र से बचने की क्षमता विकसित करने में मदद कर सकता है। यही कारण है कि यह टीकों को चकमा देने में सक्षम हो सकता है। **ब्योरा**

नई दिल्ली | विशेष संवाददाता

दुनिया में कोरोना वायरस के नए स्वरूप ओमीक्रोन के बढ़ते खतरे को देखते हुए केंद्र ने राज्यों को सतर्क किया है और तुरंत कड़े नियम लागू करने को कहा है। केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य सचिव राजेश भूषण ने राज्यों को लिखे पत्र में कहा है कि खतरे वाले देशों से आने वाले सभी यात्रियों की आरटीपीसीआर जांच सुनिश्चित करें और जो यात्री संक्रमित पाए जाएं उनके नमूने जीनोम सिक्वेंसिंग के लिए भेजें। उधर, सरकार अंतरराष्ट्रीय उड़ानें शुरू करने पर फिर समीक्षा करने जा रही है।

बहुत सतर्क रहें: भूषण ने कहा कि 'ओमीक्रोन' को डब्ल्यूएचओ ने चिंता वाला वेरिएंट घोषित किया है, इसलिए बहुत ज्यादा सतर्क रहने की जरूरत है। स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय ने उन सभी देशों को खतरे वाले देशों की सूची में डाल दिया है, जहां-जहां इसके मामले मिल रहे हैं। इन देशों से सीधे या कहीं और से होकर आने वाले यात्रियों को एयरपोर्ट पर ही आरटीपीसीआर टेस्ट कराना होगा। सात दिन के होम क्वारंटाइन में रहना होगा।

आरटीपीसीआर टेस्ट बढ़ाएं: कहा गया है कि आरटीपीसीआर टेस्ट बढ़ाएं क्योंकि हाल के दिनों में कमी आई है। ऐसे हॉटस्पॉट पर खास नजर रखें जहां बीते कुछ दिनों में मामले तेजी से बढ़े हैं, वहां तुरंत टेस्ट बढ़ाएं।

गृहमंत्रालय में आपात बैठक : गृह सचिव ने अफसरों संग आपात बैठक की। मंत्रालय ने कहा कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय उड़ानों को फिर से शुरू करने की तारीख की समीक्षा की जाएगी। विदेश से आने वाले यात्रियों की जांच और निगरानी की प्रक्रिया की समीक्षा भी की जाएगी।

- उपराज्यपाल ने आज आपात बैठक बुलाई, खतरे वाले देशों से आने वालों को अनिवार्य पृथकवास की तैयारी
- दिल्ली एयरपोर्ट पर जर्मनी से आया एक व्यक्ति संक्रमित मिला। हालांकि ओमीक्रोन है या नहीं, जांच हो रही
- **यूपी:** सभी जिलों में विदेश से आने वालों की पड़ताल के निर्देश दिए गए●
- **मध्य प्रदेश:** बीते एक महीने में विदेश से लौटे सभी यात्रियों की जांच की जाएगी●
- **कर्नाटक:** हवाईअड्डों पर निगरानी बढ़ी विदेशी यात्रियों पर रोक की मांग
- **महाराष्ट्र:** यात्रियों की आरटीपीसीआर जांच, संपर्क में आए लोगों की तलाश
- इजराइल ने सीमाएं सील कीं और विदेशी यात्रियों पर प्रतिबंध लगाए
- ब्रिटेन में कल से दुकानों, सार्वजनिक परिवहन में मास्क पहनना अनिवार्य
- जर्मनी ने बाजारों में ज्यादा भीड़ जुटने पर जुर्माना लगाने के आदेश दिए
- मोरक्को ने सभी उड़ानों पर रोक लगाई, दो हफ्ते तक सस्पेंड रहेगी

Diabetic

मधुमेह महंगी बीमारी, मरीजों को सब्सिडी दे सरकार: जस्टिस रमण ((Hindustan: 202101129)

भारत-चीन में सबसे ज्यादा वयस्क मरीज

इंटरनेशनल डायबिटीज फेडरेशन की रिपोर्ट बताती है कि चीन और भारत में सबसे अधिक मधुमेह के वयस्क मरीज हैं। भारत में यह खतरा बढ़ रहा है। देश के मुख्य न्यायाधीश एनवी रमण ने रविवार को कहा कि मधुमेह ताउम्र सताने वाली एक महंगी बीमारी है। ऐसे में यह जरूरी है कि सरकार मरीजों की देखभाल के लिए जरूरी सहायता और सब्सिडी प्रदान करे।

जस्टिस रमण ने एक संगोष्ठी में यह टिप्पणी की। उन्होंने मधुमेह को गरीबों का दुश्मन बताते हुए कहा कि स्थानीय आबादी को ध्यान में रखकर सिर्फ भारतवासियों पर शोध कराना अनिवार्य है। इससे सही उपचार प्रक्रिया विकसित करने में मदद मिलेगी। बीमारी से निपटने के लिए और अधिक स्वास्थ्य पेशेवरों को प्रशिक्षित करना होगा।

मुख्य न्यायाधीश ने कहा, कोरोना ने बता दिया है कि हमारी स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली पर अत्यधिक बोझ है। ऐसे में मधुमेह का इलाज के लिए आधुनिक दवाएं विकसित करना समय की मांग है। भारतीय वैज्ञानिक और शोधकर्ताओं ने चंद महीनों में कोरोना टीका विकसित कर लिया, यह खुशी की बात है। पर हम मधुमेह के लिए एक स्थायी इलाज खोजने के करीब भी नहीं हैं, जो एक पुरानी बीमारी है। मेरी एक ही इच्छा है कि इसका इलाज मिल जाए।