



DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

LEADING HEALTH, POPULATION AND FAMILY WELFARE STORIES OF THE DAY
Monday 202101230

maximum cases of omicron

Delhi reports maximum cases of omicron; country's tally rises to 961 (The Tribune: 202101230)

Delhi records the maximum number of 263 cases followed by Maharashtra at 252, Gujarat 97, Rajasthan 69, Kerala 65 and Telangana 62

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/delhi-reports-maximum-cases-of-omicron-countrys-tally-rises-to-961-356320>

Delhi reports maximum cases of omicron; country's tally rises to 961

Photo for representation purposes. Tribune

India saw the highest single-day rise of 180 cases of the omicron variant of coronavirus, taking the total tally of such infections in the country to 961, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

The 961 cases have been detected across 22 states and UTs so far, and 320 people have recovered or migrated.

Delhi recorded the maximum number of 263 cases followed by Maharashtra at 252, Gujarat 97, Rajasthan 69, Kerala 65 and Telangana 62.

The daily rise in Covid cases crossed the 13,000 mark after around 49 days taking the total tally of Covid cases to 3,48,22,040, while the active cases increased to 82,402, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The death toll has climbed to 4,80,860 with 268 fresh fatalities, the data stated.

A total of 13,091 new coronavirus infections were reported in a span of 24 hours on November 11.

The daily rise in new coronavirus infections has been recorded below 15,000 for the last 63 days now.

The active cases comprise 0.24 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid recovery rate was recorded at 98.38 per cent, the ministry said.

An increase of 5,400 cases has been recorded in the active Covid caseload in a span of 24 hours.

Omicron less severe but highly infectious

Omicron less severe but highly infectious, say experts; public health measures afoot (The Tribune: 202101230)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/omicron-less-severe-but-highly-infectious-say-experts-public-health-measures-afoot-356076>

The country's Omicron tally rose to 781 across 21 states and UTs on Wednesday

Omicron less severe but highly infectious, say experts; public health measures afoot

Amid curbs, people queue up outside a Metro station in New Delhi on Wednesday. Photo: MR Bhui

With the country's Omicron tally rising to 781 across 21 states and UTs on Wednesday, the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) said there was a clear experimental and clinical data supporting very high immune escape potential of Omicron, but initial estimates showed the severity of illness lower than what was seen in outbreaks reported earlier.

Editorial: Lockdown no solution

“Appropriate public health measures and investigations are being conducted in India for surveillance of Omicron,” INSACOG said, while noting that globally there appeared to be significantly reduced ability of vaccines or prior infection to protect against symptomatic infection caused by Omicron variant.

In its bulletin released on Wednesday, INSACOG said, “Delta continues to be the most prevalent variant of concern globally, but Omicron has entirely displaced it in southern Africa and is on track to become the dominant variant in Britain and elsewhere.” According to the Union Health Ministry, of the 781 Omicron patients, 241 have recovered or migrated. Delhi recorded the maximum number of 238 Omicron cases, followed by Maharashtra (167), Gujarat (73), Kerala (65) and Telangana (62).

With 9,195 people testing positive for Covid in a day, India's total tally rose to 3,48,08,886, while the active cases increased to 77,002. The death toll has climbed to 4,80,592 with 302 new fatalities. The daily rise in new infections has been recorded below 15,000 for the past 62 days now. On the vaccine front, the cumulative doses crossed 43.15 crore.

PM Modi's visit to UAE postponed

PM Narendra Modi's planned visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the first half of the next month has been postponed in view of the rising cases of Omicron, sources said.

Ready for virtual poll rallies: BJP

Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said the BJP was ready for virtual rallies in all poll-bound states, including Punjab, and would follow the ECI guidelines in the wake of Omicron threat

The government has permitted the export of 7 crore doses of 'Covovax' produced by Serum Institute of India here to Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand, official sources said.

Omicron threat

Omicron threat: Precaution dose for poll staff too (The Tribune: 202101230)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/precaution-dose-for-poll-staff-too-356077>

The poll panel is likely to announce dates for elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab and Manipur early next month

Omicron threat: Precaution dose for poll staff too

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has written to all states and UTs asking them to include the personnel to be deployed for poll duty in the category of frontline workers and make them eligible for precaution dose. - File photo

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has written to all states and UTs asking them to include the personnel to be deployed for poll duty in the category of frontline workers and make them eligible for precaution dose.

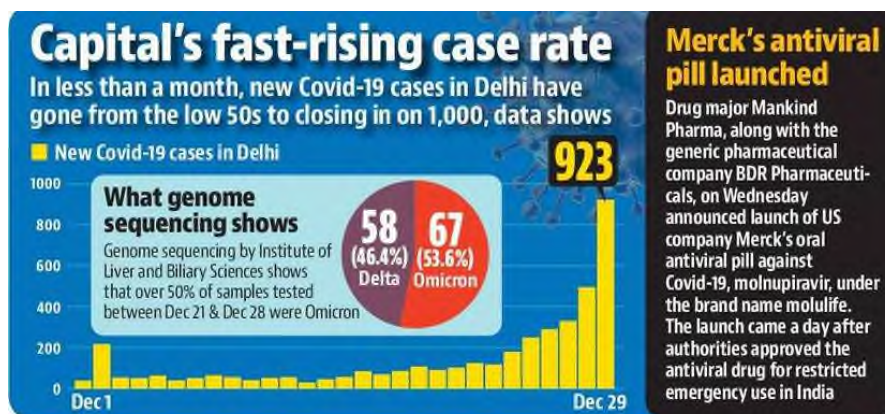
The poll panel is likely to announce dates for elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab and Manipur early next month.

“As a matter of precaution for frontline workers who have received two doses, another dose of Covid vaccine will be administered from January 10. The prioritisation of this precaution dose will be based on the completion of nine months from the date of administration of the second dose,” he said. — TNS

'New Covid -19 Cases

Wait, watch': Delhi to not raise alert level yet (Hindustan Times:202101230)

<https://epaper.hindustantimes.com/Home/ArticleView>



Yellow alert Covid-19 restrictions will continue in the Capital for the time being, the city's administration decided on Wednesday, holding off on more curbs immediately if the next level according to its graded response action plan (Grap) is breached, while monitoring the nature of the outbreak and its severity.

The decision comes at a time when scientific and epidemiological evidence from other countries suggest the Omicron variant is significantly less virulent than Delta, and is likely to lead to mild, often asymptomatic disease, even if the surge is sharp.

"It was decided to continue with the existing restrictions imposed recently in view of rising cases and to keep a close vigil on the ground situation. The health department was advised to enhance the health preparedness to deal effectively with the emerging situation and to closely monitor bed occupancy besides strengthening the home isolation strategy," lieutenant government Anil Baijal stated in a tweet.

Under the government's Covid-19 graded plan Grap, curbs on activity and movement become stricter if the number of new cases, the positivity rate or the rate of hospitalisations breach certain threshold. On Wednesday, one of these thresholds – 1% positivity rate – was breached after a gap of 212 days.

"No fresh restrictions will be immediately imposed after the positivity rate remains over 1% for two consecutive days. The government is monitoring the situation and, will take any decision about imposing fresh curbs when the needs arise," said a senior Delhi government official, who asked not to be named.

According to the health bulletin released by the government on Wednesday, of the 2,191 active cases, 55 were on oxygen support with the rest being asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic. The number of new cases were 923, comprising 1.29% of tests that were conducted.

The yellow alert, triggered when positivity rate stayed above 0.5%, led to a night curfew, closing of schools, colleges, movie theatres and gyms, triggering concerns from parents, child health experts, and the business community. Most of these groups said the government must readjust to account for Omicron variant's reduced virulence.

When amber alert is activated, public parks and gardens will have to close, Delhi Metro occupancy will need to be capped at 33%, restaurants and bars will need to shut for dine-in, and a weekend curfew will come in force.

Wednesday's decision was taken in a meeting of the DDMA chaired by Baijal, with chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, health minister Satyendra Jain, and revenue minister Kailash Gahlot in attendance, in addition to Dr VK Paul from NITI Aayog, Delhi chief secretary Vijay Dev, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria, and others.

The CM, people aware of the matter, said the DDMA should not rush to impose more curbs at this moment since the overall caseload was low and nearly 98% hospital beds were still vacant.

The people added that deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia suggested the emerging Covid situation should be closely monitored before more curbs are imposed otherwise there could be panic and people may be motivated to migrate back.

On previous occasions, drastic curbs have triggered reverse migration leading to unchecked gatherings at interstate bus terminals.

DDMA also discussed at length whether it should make some amendments to the minimum criteria fixed under Grap for imposing the curbs, including whether the words "or" between the three factors be replaced by "and".

If such a change is to be made, all three tests must be met for the next level of curbs, the amber alert: a positivity rate above 1% for two days, at least 3,500 new cases a week, and at least 700 oxygen beds in hospitals being occupied over a seven-day period.

"It was discussed whether positivity rate or new cases or hospitalisation should be given higher weightage in arriving at a decision to impose further curbs. No final decision was taken on changing the criteria even after discussion. It was decided that the DDMA should closely monitor the emerging situation and authorities should be asked to strictly enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour and strictly impose the curbs imposed under the first phase of restrictions," a government official said not wanting to be identified.

"After detailed discussion with experts the need to strictly follow and enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour was emphasised upon especially in wake of rising cases of the Omicron variant. It was also reiterated to continue with the test, track and treat strategy with special focus on surveillance, delineation of containment zones, isolation of positive cases and close monitoring of home isolation cases so as to break the chain of transmission," the LG tweeted after the DDMA meeting.

DDMA called upon all stakeholders for collective and concerted efforts to deal with the pandemic without lowering guard.

Dr Jugal Kishore, head of the department of community medicine at Safdarjung hospital, said that Covid positivity over 1% does not indicate as dangerous sign as it did with Delta variant.

“Due to high transmissibility of the Omicron variant, more infection would be there in the community but this will not result in hospital admission and case fatality. Therefore, stringent restriction would be of no use. According to recent pre-print research from South Africa, it is found that infection due to Omicron develops more neutralizing antibodies to the variant and also to Delta variant. Omicron is acting as vaccine to replace previous severe variants with milder form which could limit the pandemic in coming time,” he said.

Confederation of All India Traders general secretary Praveen Khandelwal welcomed DDMA’s move not to go immediately go ahead with fresh economic and travel curbs.

“The Covid situation appears to be under control, so the government should do away with odd-even restrictions on the markets and focus on strictly enforcing Covid appropriate behaviour. The night curfew should also be withdrawn because while protecting people from Omicron is important, protecting people from hunger is equally important,” said Khandelwal.

Genome Test (The Asian Age:202101230)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/articledetailpage.aspx?id=16067685>

■ Hospital refuses to discharge patient, mother moves court

Respond to plea for genome test report of Covid +ve man: HC

New Delhi, Dec. 29: The Delhi High Court Wednesday sought the Centre and the city government's stand on a plea by a mother wanting to know the outcome of the genome sequencing test of his Covid positive son as he was not being discharged by a private hospital for the lack of clarity on the virus variant. The 18-year-old arrived at the Delhi international airport from one of the "at-risk" countries and tested positive for Covid-19. He has been in isolation at a private hospital since the morning of December 25.

Justice Jyoti Singh stated that while the protocols imposed by the authorities ought to be followed, the petitioner was entitled to know the genome test result which was not a "national

secret".

"They (governments) have to tell who has done the genome sequencing and when is the report going to come. The court will ensure that it comes to you (mother) and for that, we have to give them a day's time. It's your son and his genome sequencing. Why shouldn't you know it? I don't understand if there is any national secret in that," the judge told the petitioner.

The court issued notice and granted time to the counsel for the two governments to seek instructions. The counsel for the Centre said the Delhi government was "managing the whole scenario" and pointed out that as per the petition, genome testing was stated to be done by the state government's LNJP hospital.

The court was further informed that as per the latest guidelines, samples for genome testing have to be mandatorily sent in case of positive cases at the international airport. The Delhi government counsel stated that it was "not clear from the petition" as to who carried out the genome test.

"Would you both consider resolving this issue and coming back and telling the court who has taken the swab and conducted the genomic testing. I'm not meddling with your guideline and protocol. I'm not interfering in anything else. My only concern as a court (is) when children are coming from foreign countries, they are anxious and their parents are anxious," the court responded.

—PTI

Helth Care Services (The Asian Age:202101230)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/articledetailpage.aspx?id=16067956>

THE ASIAN AGE

30 DECEMBER 2021

Chaos at hospitals: Young docs deserve a better deal

The immortal philosopher and Telugu poet Baddena Bhupaludu, over eight centuries ago, advised migrants going away for better opportunities to look for a doctor or healer in a place before considering settling down there. A place is as rich, safe, happy and liveable as it has a *vaidya*, or doctors.

His simple adage of wisdom also has a didactic instruction of profound substance — a society must treat its doctors as gods, as those who delicately stand between illness and good health, between death and life. Doctors have, deservedly, received the highest respect in every civilisation, culture, country and society worthy of any respect.

In India too, since time immemorial, we have chronicles of how kings to common folk have held the healer in highest regards and echelon of society. But modern India, like other paradoxes it contains, has easily learnt to despise that which it must love, treat with contempt those who we must respect — from women to the learned — we so easily can profess to worship those whom we treat in the worst, most unfair fashions.

The NEET exams were postponed because of the pandemic, unlike say elections, and then when finally held and results declared, a moratorium was imposed on counselling over legal scrutiny of EWS criteria

Young doctors having to come out on to the streets to protest for the fairest of demands which is not a case of their enlightened self-interest but that of everyone else — seeking a continuum in national and public healthcare resource building — by ensuring the next batch of post-graduate medical students enter the system — would seem needless in the healthiest of times.

That young bright doctors of India have to take to the streets and wish to march to the Supreme Court, seeking a closure to the issue of counselling to the next batch of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), at the year-end of two years of an ongoing global

health crisis and pandemic, at the possible onset of an inevitable next wave of rising cases, is bizarrely Kafkaesque.

The NEET exams were postponed because of the pandemic, unlike say elections, and then when finally held and results declared, a moratorium was imposed on counselling owing to the legal scrutiny over a change in annual income limits by the government to define the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) eligibility, thus shifting the entire burden of a series of misses on the current batch of young doctors.

These doctors, working the hardest of times during the peaks of pandemic, have had no replacement or replenishment of staff, have been overworked, are stretched to the seams physically and emotionally, and are the same people we, as a nation and people, stood up to pay our respects to on the calling of our Prime Minister Modi as frontline warriors.

With greater ease than flipping a coin, we had male cops dragging marching female doctors off the streets to police stations, manhandling them. Young doctors breaking down, crying, loudly wondering why they ever chose the noblest of professions, is not a sight a modern India needs.

Let us address their concerns immediately. Let legal wrangles not disturb continuity. Let the process of deciding on right and wrong have an onus of declaring outcomes within timelines. The prescription is clear — let us respect our young doctors. Without them, we won't be a liveable country.

Pandamic (The Asian Age:202101230)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/articledetailpage.aspx?id=16067954>

Polarisation in pandemic times is the price we pay



Patralekha
Chatterjee

Dev 360

How does one capture one's feelings about 2021 as it draws to a close?

Two narratives leap out — one, religious polarisation; two, economic misery as the Covid-19 pandemic rages. There is good reason to believe the first is being used to rally the base as well as keep the second out of the limelight.

The narrative grabbing headlines in recent days pivots around the persistent drip-drip of hate speech against minorities, hate crimes and mobs taking the law into their own hands on one pretext or the other.

Arguably, neither hate speech nor hate crime nor mob justice is new. What is new, however, is the brazenness with which they are happening.

In December alone, a "dharam sansad", or a religious parliament, turned into a hate-fest in the holy city of Haridwar when some Hindutva protagonists openly called for a "war against Muslims". On Christmas Eve, effigies of Santa Claus were set ablaze in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, by members of Hindu vigilante groups chanting "Santa Claus Murdabad". They claimed that the mythical figure was part of some giant conspiracy by Christian missionaries to convert people. The day after Christmas, a life-size statue of Jesus Christ was desecrated in Ambala, Haryana, by unidentified individuals. And on Christmas Day, the home ministry "refused" to renew the foreign-funding licence for the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa.

These are not scattered, isolated incidents. They are part of the geography of sharply escalating intolerance towards the

This attempt to see the minorities as the problem often obscures the real problem — the state of the economy as the pandemic rages.

The two storylines need to be seen together.

What comes across as attempts to deepen fissures and further polarise the public as Assembly elections in key states like Uttar Pradesh draw closer is also doing the job of diverting public attention from the critical issue of jobs and livelihoods.

The Reserve Bank of India says economic recovery is gaining momentum. But fear and uncertainty among ordinary people are hard to miss.

At a tony café in Greater Kailash II, South Delhi, a waiter tells me he is worried. A sense of disturbing déjà vu has enveloped the national capital as it heads towards another lockdown. During earlier lockdowns, the young man did not get his salary. He says he is lucky that he gets one now, unlike so many others working in the hospitality sector who have seen their incomes drop. But old anxieties are back. The waiter is afraid that the café could shut down and he would be without a salary once again.

A therapist in the same neighbourhood looks tense while flashing her customary smile. New restrictions in Delhi mandates that the spa where she works will remain closed in the coming days. She has run out of savings to pay for rent in case she does not get her salary.

Down the road, a migrant worker from Bihar is plying a cyclecart equipped with a mini cooking gas cylinder. He sells hot tea on bitterly cold days for ₹10 a cup. He has taken to doing this, alongside his regular job as a part-time domestic

This attempt to see the minorities as the problem often obscures the real problem — the state of the economy as the pandemic rages. The two storylines need to be seen together.

megacity.

These are real people; these are real concerns even as the Hindutva brigade talks incessantly about Hindus being in danger. The people I spoke to were Hindus. The threat they face is loss of livelihood, not people from another faith.

Here are a few numbers which I collated from publicly-available data and which tell a sorry tale. An online survey conducted by National Small Industries Corporation reveals about nine per cent of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have shut shop due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 9,052 self-employed people died by suicide in 2019. That number rose to 11,716 in 2020, according to government data.

It's no secret that millions of jobs have been lost since the onset of the pandemic and workers who are part of the informal sector, the mainstay of the Indian economy, have been very badly hit. The economy is improving slightly but the better employment numbers mask greater workload and wage insecurity.

In a recent commentary piece, Mahesh Vyas, CEO and MD of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), an economic think tank, said: "Headline data on employment in November 2021 is mildly encouraging but the details underlying these are quite disappointing. The encouraging signs are that the unemployment rate declined from 7.8 per cent in October to seven per cent in November; the employment rate rose by a whisker from 37.28 per cent to 37.34 per cent. This translated into employ-

November 2021."

But here's the catch. "The first disappointment in the November data is that the labour participation rate (LPR) has fallen. It fell from 40.41 per cent in October to 40.15 per cent in November. This is the second consecutive month of a fall in the LPR. Cumulatively, the LPR has fallen by 0.51 percentage points over October and November 2021," Mr Vyas noted. The LPR is a marker of how many able and employable people are actually looking for work.

The other worry is that employment is falling faster in urban than in rural areas. Then, as Mr Vyas tells us, there is the fall in salaried jobs and a fall in the count of entrepreneurs in the November data. "Salaried jobs fell by 6.8 million. Entrepreneurs declined by 3.5 million. These were compensated by an 11.2 million increase in employment among daily wage labourers and small traders. This again points to deterioration in the quality of employment. Salaried jobs, at 77.2 million, were 9.7 percent lower in November 2021 than they were in November 2019."

All this comes at a time of rising food prices, overall high inflation, and the hyper-transmissible coronavirus variant Omicron that could potentially derail economic recovery.

With such pressing challenges, why is the ruling BJP and its supporters keen on stirring the pot, stoking ancient hatreds, and digging up combustible issues? At a time when the country needs to come together, hate speeches are dividing the public. No country struggling with the pandemic, an economic slowdown and millions of poor people without any social safety net can afford to focus on anything else besides the health, lives and livelihoods of its people.

Going into a new year, we, the people of India, must say this. Loudly.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be

Omicron: Don't panic, stay alert

SULOGNA MEHTA

Since the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the world has experienced epidemic waves with the Alpha (UK Variant), Beta (South Africa), Gamma (Brazil) and Delta (India) variants of concern (VOCs) dominating India with second wave (Delta variant). As if to make things worse, the New Year has brought along a new challenge in the form of Omicron — a variant of the deadly coronavirus or SARS-CoV-2, which WHO has termed as a “variant of concern”.

According to medical experts, though Omicron appears less deadly compared to its Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta predecessors, it's the most contagious or rapidly spreading form of coronavirus detected so far.

Globally, the number of new cases has crossed 1.5 lakh within a month, spreading to more than 100 countries. In India too, if cases soar, one can expect a third wave, which is certain to cause major devastation.

Doctors and scientists share their understanding about the Omicron variant.



Get vaccinated, remain masked and avoid crowds to counter an ominous Omicron attack, say experts

MOST CONTAGIOUS

Omicron is undoubtedly the most contagious of all the coronavirus variants yet detected though for now, we haven't witnessed it to be as deadly as its predecessors like the delta variant. We've also not yet come across any unique symptoms for this variant. However, it's too early to claim if it'd cause deaths here as Omicron deaths have been reported in the West.

“If the number of cases increases in India, it can cause huge devastation, with deaths being directly proportionate to the number of cases.”

“Also, when the first coronavirus struck in 2020 and the Delta variant in early 2021, mainly in the months of March-May, the vaccination drive had just started. Majority of the population were non-vaccinated and so the deaths and destruction was very high. But recently, when Omicron cases are being reported, around 50% of the adult population in India has been double vaccinated. Therefore, even if vaccines may not 100% prevent the virus and vaccine-generated antibodies would come down over time, it can still reduce the severity of the disease and mortality. So a case of the virus attack on the vaccinated would only cause milder infections. Therefore, it's highly recommended that those without the vaccine shot must get the shot immediately.”

“The same COVID protocols apply for prevention of COVID, including wearing masks properly, sanitising one's hands and surroundings, and avoiding crowds.”

CAN BE DANGEROUS

Undoubtedly, the Omicron variant of coronavirus is more contagious than the Delta variant, but there's no evidence yet to declare it as more severe.

However, unless we're vigilant, vaccinated and take preventive measures, Omicron may replace the Delta variant in a new wave.

“As it's a breakthrough infection, there's no guarantee against hospitalisation or a recurrence even if people are fully vaccinated and had COVID earlier. However, vaccination can reduce the severity of the attack.”

“For those unvaccinated, the Omicron attack can turn out to be as dangerous as the Delta variant

especially if one has co-morbidities or risk factors. Those vaccinated but did not receive a booster dose may escape a serious disease only if they have no risk factors.

Therefore, as a safeguard, a full vaccination with booster dose is needed, apart from one wearing surgical or KN95 masks.

“At present, in AP, only five per cent of samples collected from each lab are sent for genome sequencing but since there has been a general decline in total number of cases now, it is better that every sample is tested for Omicron variant. More labs like the CCMB-Hyderabad are required where genome sequencing of samples can be carried out.”



A breakthrough infection, no guarantee against hospitalisation

— DR P V SUDHAKAR, special officer for COVID-19, North-Coastal Andhra, and principal of Andhra Medical College

OMINOUS OMICRON

- As on 29 December, India's Omicron tally reached 781.
- Highest number of Omicron cases reported from Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Telangana
- By 26 December, Omicron had been detected in 117 countries, with many countries reporting community transmission.
- Doctors and scientists consider Omicron the most contagious of all variants of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) detected so far.
- No unique symptoms have been noticed in the Omicron variant and symptoms like fever, body-ache etc. remain the same as its earlier variants. Patients are often asymptomatic.
- It's been observed that a full vaccination reduces the severity of the virus attack though it may not provide 100% protection.

ONLY GENOME SEQUENCING CAN CONFIRM



Not PCR tests but genome sequencing can confirm the mutating Omicron variant

— A ANURADHA, research scientist, multidisciplinary research unit (MDRU) labs, Government King George Hospital (KGH)

Omicron has been detected with the Network for Genomics Surveillance of South Africa (NGS-SA) from specimens collected in November 2021.

“A significant factor indicated by several labs is that in the widely used PCR test for coronavirus detection, one of the three target genes is not detected (called S gene dropout or S gene target failure — SGTF). The missing S gene indicates that this particular variant is different from the earlier variants. However, only genome sequencing can confirm whether this particular variant is omicron or not.”

“A recent study titled ‘Early assessment of the clinical severity of the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant in South Africa’ by Nicole Wolter states that the PCR tests are reporting an increase in the number of samples with SGTF even when symptoms are present.”

“Omicron also shows more mutations suspected to invade the immunity system. Though it has a few mutations in common with the earlier variants, it also has 22 additional substitutions (genetic inclusions or deletions) not yet seen in any other variant.”

“The CDC expects anyone with Omicron infection can spread the virus to others, even if they are vaccinated or are asymptomatic. It's observed that those vaccinated have a reduced risk of hospitalisation among the Omicron or SGTF-infected individuals. Complications were lesser in SGTF-infected individuals as compared to the earlier Delta-infected individuals.”

“Being the protective factor, vaccination needs to be ramped up for all sectors, irrespective of age. Following COVID-19 safety norms is also imperative to avoid the virus.”

Most contagious coronavirus variant with high potential for causing devastation if cases increase manifold

— DR YOGIRAJ RAY, associate professor, Infectious Diseases, Government SSKM Hospital (IPGIMER)



Full vaccination

Full vaccination, Covid negative report must to attend public functions: Goa CM (The Indian Express:202101230)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/goa/goa-covid-full-vaccination-negative-report-must-to-attend-public-functions-7697531/>

The government has also ordered that restaurants, pubs, bars must allow entry to only those guests who are fully vaccinated or have a negative test report in addition to adhering to Covid-19 protocols.

AHEAD OF new year's eve celebrations in Goa, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant Wednesday said that organisers of parties in restaurants and other public functions will have to ensure that their guests are either fully vaccinated or have a negative test report for Covid-19.

“A lot of functions have been planned in Goa ahead of December 31. Wherever there are public functions, a Covid negative certificate or a full vaccination certificate will be required. This will be implemented through our Collectors and the home department,” Sawant said.

The government has also ordered that restaurants, pubs, bars must allow entry to only those guests who are fully vaccinated or have a negative test report in addition to adhering to Covid-19 protocols.

On Wednesday evening, state revenue secretary Sanjay Kumar issued an order restricting the operation of casinos, cinema halls, auditoria, community halls, river cruises, water parks and entertainment parks to 50 percent of their capacity, as the test positivity rate climbed above 5 per cent. Violation of the order would attract a penalty under sections of the IPC and the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

The order stated that “the number of Covid-19 cases being reported in Goa is increasing, and the situation might further aggravate if public gatherings and active interaction is permitted unrestricted.”

The move comes at a time that the tourist season is at its peak and two days after the first case of the Omicron variant was detected in Goa.

Health minister Vishwajit Rane said that in view of the rising Covid-19 cases, there had been a significant jump from 112 new cases on Tuesday to 170 on Wednesday that was similar to what had taken place during April-May 2021 when the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic had gripped the state. “I have suggested to Director, DHS (Directorate of Health Services) and

Dean GMC (Goa Medical College) to convene an emergency meeting with expert doctors to suggest measures,” Rane tweeted.

“Goa being a tourist destination, it is very important for us to protect the citizens as well as the tourists. The govt. is driven by expert advice of the doctors. We are waiting for them to deliberate & make concrete suggestions. This will help us to be in a better position to take appropriate action in light of the increasing number of cases,” Rane said in a tweet.

The order issued by the revenue secretary on Wednesday stated that places of public amusement like spas, massage parlors, restaurants, pubs, bars, halls, auditoria, gyms, marriage venues, cinema halls and entertainment parks will also have to follow Covid-19 safety protocols and allow entry only to asymptomatic guests and staff who are either fully vaccinated for more than 15 days or possess a covid-19 negative test report not more than a day old.

Covid-19 India highlights

Covid-19 India highlights: Several states, including Maharashtra, report huge spike in cases(The Indian Express:202101230)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/covid-india-highlights-cases-omicron-7696484/>

Meanwhile, Indian SARS-COV-2 Genomics Consortia INSACOG said in its latest bulletin that there is now clear experimental and clinical data supporting very high immune escape potential of Omicron, but initial estimates show the severity of illness being lower than what was seen in previous outbreaks

Covid-19 Covid-19 testing near Loni Road crossing in New Delhi. (Express photo by Praveen Khanna)

With 9,195 people testing positive for Covid-19 in a day, India’s total tally of Covid-19 cases rose to 3,48,08,886 on Wednesday. According to the data, which was last updated at 8 am, there are 77,002 active cases in the country. The Health Ministry, while referring to the data, also said that India has recorded 781 cases of the Omicron variant across 21 states and UTs so far, out of which 241 people have recovered or migrated.

Here are the top developments on Covid-19 from across the country.

Several states report huge single-day spike in cases

Delhi and Rajasthan were among several states which reported a sharp spike in Covid-19 cases on Wednesday. Delhi reported 923 fresh cases on Wednesday, which marked a steep rise from the 496 detected a day earlier. The positivity rate also jumped up to 1.29%. For the first time in almost six months, Rajasthan reported a single-day spike of more than 100 cases.

Among other cities, Mumbai registered a huge spike, recording 2,510 cases. Moreover, 400 infections were detected in Bengaluru, 540 in Kolkata and 294 in Chennai.

Maharashtra reported 3,900 fresh Covid-19 cases on Wednesday, marking a steep rise from the 2,172 infections detected in the state a day earlier.

Out of the fresh cases, 2,510 were from Mumbai, which is also a big jump from the 1,333 infections reported a day ago. The city also recorded one death due to Covid-19. There are 8,060 active Covid-19 cases in Mumbai now.

Clear data supporting very high immune escape potential of Omicron: INSACOG

There is now clear experimental and clinical data supporting very high immune escape potential of Omicron, but initial estimates show the severity of illness being lower than what was seen in previous outbreaks, the Indian SARS-COV-2 Genomics Consortia INSACOG said in its latest bulletin citing global data.

In India, appropriate public health measures and investigations are being conducted for surveillance of Omicron, INSACOG said while noting that globally there appears to be significantly reduced ability of vaccines or prior infection to protect against symptomatic infection by the Omicron variant.

“While Delta continues to be the most prevalent VOC globally, the Omicron variant has completely displaced it in southern Africa and is on track to become the dominant variant in UK and elsewhere,” INSACOG said in its bulletin.

“Initial estimates of severity of illness have, however, been lower than seen in previous outbreaks. Whether these initial observations are generalisable to older non-immune subjects is not clear and the threat level is still considered high,” it said.

Bengal CM asks officials to review Covid situation, says schools and colleges will be shut if need be

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday asked officials concerned to review the overall Covid-19 situation in the state, amid the threat of a possible third wave of the pandemic looming large.

She asked the officials to identify containment zones in the city, where cases have been on the rise. Banerjee, during an administrative review meeting at Sagar Island, also said that schools and colleges might be shut down for some time if the situation so demands.

Offices could be asked to function with just 50 per cent employee attendance, if necessary, she stated.

“Covid-19 cases are on the rise... there are a few Omicron cases also. So, review the situation in the state. We may consider closing down schools and colleges for some time,” Banerjee told officials at the meeting.

The CM, who is visiting the island to take stock of the arrangements for the annual Gangasagar mela, also said that a decision on international flight and local train services will also be taken after the Covid-19 situation is reviewed in the state.

Meanwhile, at least five more persons in West Bengal tested positive for Omicron on Wednesday, taking the total number of patients infected by the new variant of coronavirus in the state to 11, a senior health department official said.

Traders in Delhi request DDMA to amend Covid restrictions under GRAP

The Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI), an umbrella body of different trade unions in Delhi, urged the DDMA on Wednesday to amend the restrictions under the GRAP for Covid-19 and consider two other indicators as well — the number of fresh cases of the infection and that of the oxygen beds occupied — before announcing any colour-coded alert.

CTI chairman Brijesh Goyal said he has written to the DDMA, urging it to amend the GRAP conditions as traders are facing huge losses because of the restrictions.

“At present, Delhi is neither reporting 1,500 coronavirus cases per day nor 500 oxygen beds are occupied. According to the CTI, there is a need to make changes in the colour-code provisions. If all three conditions — the infection rate, the number of fresh cases and the oxygen bed occupancy — are being met simultaneously, then the restrictions under a GRAP colour code should be imposed,” Goyal was quoted as saying by news agency PTI.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has sounded a “yellow” alert under its Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) after the Covid positivity rate in the national capital was recorded above 0.5 per cent for two consecutive days.

The DDMA on Tuesday ordered a closure of schools, colleges, cinema halls and gymnasiums with immediate effect and clamped various restrictions on the functioning of shops and public transport.

Delhi Health Minister says rise in cases due to international flights coming in

Amid a spike in Covid-19 cases in the city, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday said many international travellers, who have tested negative at the airport, are testing positive after a few days and infecting their family members during the period.

“The cases have increased due to international flights. Even during the earlier wave, the cases rose with flights coming in,” the minister told reporters.

Delhi on Wednesday recorded 238 Omicron cases. There were 165 cases of the new variant a day earlier.

The national capital on Tuesday registered a massive spike in daily Covid-19 with 496 fresh cases, the highest since June 4, while the positivity rate also rose to 0.89 percent along with one fatality.

Rise in active Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra ‘alarming’: Health Minister Rajesh Tope

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday expressed concern over the rise in the number of fresh as well as active Covid-19 cases in the state, and termed it as an “alarming situation”.

Talking to reporters here, Tope urged people and authorities to exercise caution. He said in the last 8-10 days, the active cases in the state stood in the range of 5,000-6,000.

On Tuesday, the state had 11,492 active cases. On Wednesday, the number of active cases could rise over 20,000, he said.

Mental disorders

Baby teeth may later help identify kids at risk for mental disorders: Study Bristol, (New Kerala:2021011230)

According to a study by the University of Bristol, baby teeth could one day lead to the development of a much-needed tool for identifying children who a-> View it--> <https://www.newkerala.com/news/2021/183202.htm>

Oxidative stress

Covid severely increases levels of oxidative stress, damage: US (New Kerala:2021011230)

researchers have found that people hospitalised with Covid-19 infection have **significantly** raised levels of oxidative stress, oxidant damage and markedly reduced levels -> View it--> <https://www.newkerala.com/news/2021/183185.htm>

Physical activity

Study examines physical activity, sleep among arthritis patients (New Kerala:2021011230)

A new research has examined patterns of 24-hour physical activity and sleep among patients with rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and knee osteoarthritis.->> View it--> <https://www.newkerala.com/news/2021/183155.htm>

Health System

Omicron risk 'very high,' could ravage health systems: WHO (New Kerala:2021011230)

The overall risk associated with the Omicron variant remains 'very high' which could cause widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services, the World Health Organization says.-> View it--> <https://www.newkerala.com/news/2021/183122.htm>

Pregnancy

Immune system can detect disease during pregnancy: Study (New Kerala:2021011230)

Pregnancy is a challenge for the mother's immune system from the outset. Half of the genes in the foetus are foreign to her body.->> View it--> <https://www.newkerala.com/news/2021/182774.htm>

Antibodies

Scientists identify antibodies that can neutralise Omicron (New Kerala:2021011230)

An international team of scientists have identified antibodies that neutralise Omicron and other SARS-CoV-2 variants. These antibodies target areas of the virus spike protein.-> View it--> <https://www.newkerala.com/news/2021/182745.htm>

