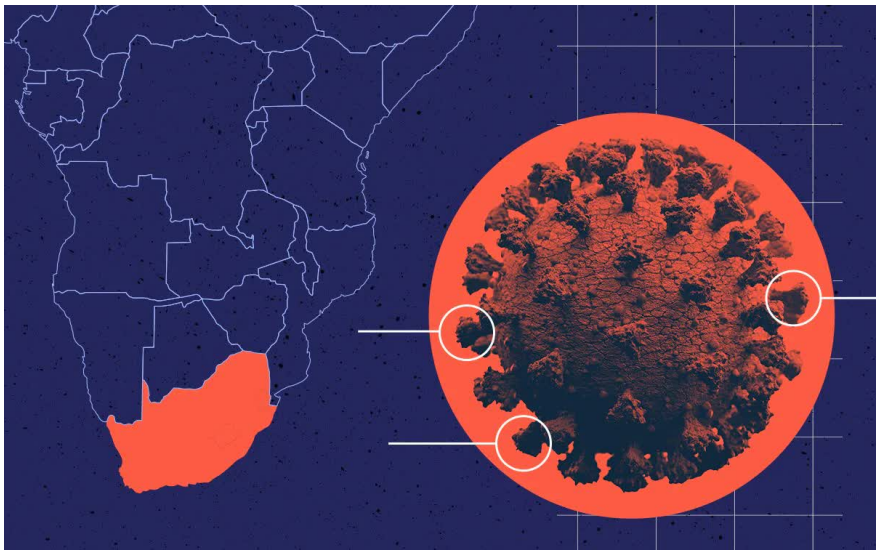
Official: WHO recognizes new worrying COVID-19 variant Omicron

Preliminary evidence suggests an increased risk of reinfection with the Omicron variant compared with other VOC variants of concern, the WHO said.

During a surprise meeting last night, the World Health Organization (WHO) assessed the new COVID-19 strain they discovered in South Africa and classified it as a variant of concern (VOC). This variant has been named Omicron and officially joins the list with the previous Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta strains.

"The Technical Advisory Group on the Evolution of the SARS-CoV-2 Virus (TAG-VE) was convened on November 26, 2021 to evaluate the SARS-CoV-2 variant: B.1.1.529" , WHO said in a press release.

"Based on the evidence presented showing adverse variability in the epidemiology of COVID-19, TAG-VE recommended that WHO designate this variant as a variant of concern, and WHO B.1.1.529 is called VOC, named Omicron".



TAG-VE is a group of independent WHO experts tasked with periodically monitoring and evaluating the evolution of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. At the same time, they are also constantly assessing whether specific mutations and combinations of those mutations change the behavior of the virus.

The results of their evaluation of the new variant Omicron showed that it has a large number of mutations, many of which are worrisome. "Preliminary evidence suggests an increased risk of reinfection with this variant compared with other VOC variants of concern. The number of cases of this variant appears to be increasing in most provinces in South Africa.

Current PCR diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 continues to detect many infections with this variant. Several laboratories have pointed out that the currently commonly used PCR test is unable to detect one of the three target genes (so-called neglected or untargeted S gene).

Therefore, this assay can be used as a marker for this variant pending confirmation of the genomic sequence. Using that approach, this variant was detected at a faster rate than in previous infections, suggesting that the new variant may have a growth advantage," WHO wrote in a statement. newspapers.

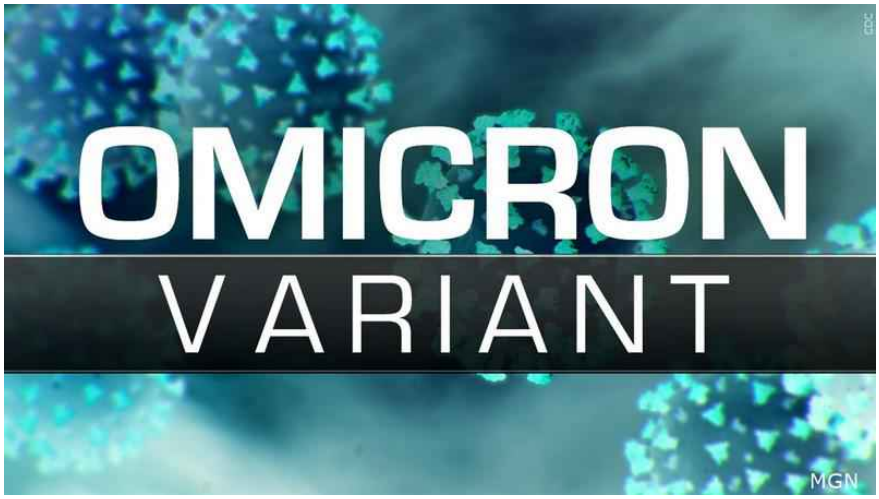
"There is some urgent research underway and TAG-VE will continue to evaluate this variant going forward. WHO will communicate its new findings to Member States and the public as needed. ".

Recalling the characteristics of a VOC variant of concern in the WHO rating scale, Omicron achieved the following criteria:

1. There are genetic changes predicted or known to affect viral characteristics such as: transmissibility, disease severity, immune evasion, diagnosis or treatment.

2. Causing significant community transmission or outbreaks of multiple clusters of COVID-19, in multiple countries with increasing relative prevalence coupled with increasing number of cases over time.

3. There may be other obvious epidemiological effects to suggest a new risk to global public health



In response to this new VOC variant, WHO recommends countries:

- strengthen surveillance and sequencing efforts to better understand circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants.

- submit the complete genome sequence and associated metadata to a publicly available database, such as GISAID.

- report initial cases/clusters related to VOC contamination to WHO through the IHR mechanism.

- when competent and in collaboration with the international community, conduct field investigations and laboratory assessments to improve understanding of the potential effects of VOCs on COVID-19 epidemiology, levels of severity, effectiveness of social and public health measures, diagnostic methods, immune response, neutralizing antibodies, or other relevant characteristics.

Individuals are reminded to take precautions like 5K to reduce their risk of COVID-19, including: wearing masks properly, washing hands frequently, keeping physical distance, improving indoor ventilation, avoiding crowded spaces and fully vaccinated.