

Omicron coronavirus variant spreading worldwide

29th November, 2021



A new variant of the covid-19 virus is beginning to spread worldwide. The WHO named the mutation Omicron, after a letter of the Greek alphabet. It was first reported in Botswana on the 9th of November. Two weeks later, it was detected in

South Africa and flagged as a "virus of concern". Soon after this, cases were reported in Hong Kong, Israel, Madagascar and Belgium. Epidemiologists have warned that this new strain could be extremely infectious. They also said it may be able to evade protections afforded us by current vaccines. This has led to countries reinstating travel bans. Despite these, new cases have already been reported in the UK, Germany and the Czech Republic.

Scientists are currently analyzing Omicron to assess the dangers it might pose. They have detected 50 genetic changes in the DNA that affects the spikes surrounding the crown of the virus. Current vaccines focus on these spikes. Any changes in the DNA of the spikes could make the virus more virulent, more transmissible and possibly more resistant against vaccines. Scientists say it could take a few weeks to determine how effective our vaccines are against Omicron. The White House's chief medical adviser has warned that: "When you have a virus that is showing this degree of transmissibility, and you're already having travel-related cases...it almost invariably is ultimately going to go all over [the world]."

Sources: nypost.com / aljazeera.com / npr.org

Writing

Richer countries should share many more vaccines with poorer countries. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

variant / covi-19 / virus / WHO / Omicron / concern / epidemiologist / travel ban / scientists / dangers / genetic changes / DNA / vaccines / transmissibility / the world

True / False

- 1) The new Omicron variant was named by South Africa's government. T / F
- 2) The Omicron variant was first reported in Botswana on November 19. T / F
- 3) Israel, Madagascar and Belgium have reported cases of Omicron. T / F
- 4) Epidemiologists say current vaccines will protect us against Omicron. T / F
- 5) Scientists have found 50 different genetic changes in Omicron. T / F
- 6) Vaccines currently in use focus on the centre of the coronavirus crown. T / F
- 7) Scientists need over two months to know if vaccines can fight Omicron. T / F
- 8) The White House said Omicron would spread all across the world. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1. variant | a. deadly |
| 2. spread | b. catching |
| 3. flagged | c. present |
| 4. infectious | d. always |
| 5. evade | e. form |
| 6. pose | f. find out |
| 7. focus | g. dodge |
| 8. virulent | h. disseminate |
| 9. determine | i. concentrate |
| 10. invariably | j. marked |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What dangers might Omicron pose?
- c) What happens if Omicron is very virulent and transmissible?
- d) Have you argued with anyone about covid-19?
- e) How has the current pandemic affected your life?
- f) When do you think the pandemic will be over?
- g) Do you think there should be a global travel ban?
- h) What questions would you like to ask epidemiologists?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. The WHO named the | a. pose |
| 2. flagged as a virus of | b. travel bans |
| 3. this new strain could be | c. changes in the DNA |
| 4. They also said it may be able to | d. of transmissibility |
| 5. This has led to countries reinstating | e. extremely infectious |
| 6. assess the dangers it might | f. mutation Omicron |
| 7. They have detected 50 genetic | g. vaccines |
| 8. make the virus more | h. evade protections |
| 9. more resistant against | i. virulent |
| 10. showing this degree | j. concern |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you know about the Omicron variant?
- How worried are you about covid-19?
- What success has your country had with covid-19?
- How dangerous do you think Omicron will be?
- What do you do stay safe during the pandemic?
- Do you think people will take necessary precautions against Omicron?
- What do you think of the covid vaccines?
- What advice do you have for people now Omicron is here?

Spelling

- The WHO named the mtuintoa Omicron
- after a letter of the Greek athbpale
- it was eeetdcdt in South Africa
- this new strain could be extremely icefuitnos
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- possibly more nsettsrai
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- this degree of siybtsisinramitl
- ealmtiyiltu going to go all over the world

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. h	3. j	4. b	5. g
6. c	7. i	8. a	9. f	10. d

Role Play

Role A – Hand Washing

You think hand washing is the best way to keep covid-19 at bay. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their methods. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): mask wearing, social distancing or ventilation.

Role B – Mask Wearing

You think mask wearing is the best way to keep covid-19 at bay. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their methods. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): hand washing, social distancing or ventilation.

Role C – Social Distancing

You think social distancing is the best way to keep covid-19 at bay. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their methods. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): mask wearing, hand washing or ventilation.

Role D – Ventilation

You think ventilation is the best way to keep covid-19 at bay. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their methods. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): mask wearing, social distancing or hand washing.

Speaking – Covid Measures

Rank these with your partner. Put the best measures to keep the virus at bay at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Hand sanitizer | • Hand washing |
| • Ventilation | • Social isolation |
| • Talking quietly | • Mask wearing |
| • Losing weight | • Social distancing |

Answers – True False

1 F	2 F	3 T	4 F	5 T	6 F	7 F	8 T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.