

Expect More Variants After Omicron; Researchers with Caution

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The omicron variant which spreads globally now may not be the last variant of SARS-CoV-2. With each new infection the virus gets a chance to transform. The virus will evolve more as it reaches more people. The virologists do not know about the next variants which are coming or how they will determine the course of the epidemic. The experts are not sure that the coming variants will cause mild illness or whether the existing vaccines will be effective against them. As omicron spread faster, there are more opportunities for mutations, which can lead to more variants. Omicron is more likely to re-infect previously infected individuals with Covid-19 and to infect vaccinated individuals than Delta. Longer and more permanent infections seem to be a nidus for newer variants to emerge. It happens when there is widespread infection.

The mutations happening in SARS-CoV-2 may continue to change in ways that speed up the virus transmission while also reducing vaccine effectiveness. The omicron has many more mutations than the previous variants; about 30 of such in the spike proteins which help to bind to human cells. The IHU variant identified in France and monitored by the World Health Organization, which does not appear to be more widespread, has 46 mutations. Scientists recommend continuing with public health measures such as wearing a mask and getting vaccinated to prevent the appearance of variants. Until high levels of vaccine-mediated protections are achieved across the world, it could be disastrous if measures such as mask wearing, social distancing, and hand sanitization are relaxed carelessly.

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The pandemic's overall outcome will be determined by a number of factors. A nationalistic rather than a global strategy to vaccine delivery is not only unethical, but it will also prolong any return to "normalcy," because no country can be safe until all countries are secure. The most important factor right now is limiting your viral exposure, regardless of the variant which is spreading.

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