

Sigh of Relief in South Africa as Omicron Variant Appears to be ‘Super Mild’ Mutation with COVID Death Rate Not Jumping

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The WHO and Coronavirus experts are increasingly convinced the new Omicron variant is ‘super mild’ and has, so far, not led to a jump in Covid death rates anywhere in Southern Africa.

The WHO is calling this morning for countries to drop travel restrictions and end the mass hysteria, and instead be cautiously optimistic as more and more reports out of South Africa suggest the new Omicron variant is not more lethal than the previous Delta variant.

In fact, there have been no reports of hospitalisations or deaths as a result of anyone being diagnosed with Omicron.

Most patients merely experience a severe headache, nausea, dizziness and a high pulse rate, according to hospitals and medics across Southern Africa.

However, the news of the new variant, first reported in South Africa, led to mass hysteria around the world: markets thumbed and dozens of countries imposed travel restrictions and additional checks, including the UK, US, EU, Israel, Australia and Japan after the new mutation [popped up](#) in the UK, Germany, Italy, Czech Republic and Israel among other countries.

‘A hype’

Dr Angelique Coetzee, chair of the South African Medical Association, said this reaction was “medically seen, not justified.”

A GP for over three decades, and chair of the South African Medical Association, she was the first African doctor to suggest to local authorities Covid had mutated into a new strain.

Coetzee called the response from many European countries, including the UK, “just a hype.”

“Looking at the mildness of the symptoms we are seeing, currently there is no reason for panicking as we don’t see any severely ill patients.”

South Africa’s health minister **Joe Phaahla** also said the majority of cases of Omicron seen by doctors in his country have been “mild”.

Asked what he knows about how unwell people are who have it, Dr Phaahla said: “It is still too early at this stage.

He added he has heard from GPs that the “majority of the people they’ve been seeing are mild.”

“Our clinicians have not witnessed severe illness. Part of it may be because the majority of those who are positive are young people,” Dr Paahla added.

Hundreds of infected people across Southern Africa reportedly complain of nausea, headaches, fatigue and a high pulse rate, but none seem to suffer from a loss of taste or smell, which has been the case with most other Covid mutations.

Moreover, more and more medics across Southern Africa are confirming that most Omicron-infected patients merely have a severe headache, nausea or dizziness.

WHO criticises travel bans

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also urged countries around the world not to impose flight bans on southern African nations due to concerns over the Omicron variant.

In fact, the WHO fiercely lashed out at the UK and other countries, calling their response “extreme.”

Dr Catherine Smallwood, Senior Emergency Officer at WHO’s Regional Office for Europe, said “these types of interventions are not sustainable. Those types of extreme measures are not our recommendations.”

The WHO’s regional director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, called on countries “to follow science” and international health regulations in order to avoid using travel restrictions.

“If restrictions are implemented, they should not be unnecessarily invasive or intrusive, and should be scientifically based, according to the international health regulations, which is a legally binding instrument of international law recognised by over 190 nations, Dr Moeti added.

Cases of the Omicron variant have [popped up](#) in countries on opposite sides of the world and many governments rushed to close their borders even as scientists cautioned that it is not clear if the new variant is more alarming than other versions of the virus.

While investigations continue into the Omicron variant, the WHO recommends that all countries “take a risk-based and scientific approach and put in place measures which can limit its possible spread”.

Dr Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health in the United States, emphasised that there is no data yet that suggests the new variant causes more serious

illness than previous Covid-19 variants.

“I do think it’s more contagious, when you look at how rapidly it spread through multiple districts in South Africa,” Dr Collins said.

Omicron could kill off Delta

The high level of contagiousness, paired with very mild symptoms, may make Omicron a blessing in disguise.

Looking at the first data coming out of Southern Africa, virologist Marc van Ranst said this weekend that “if the omicron variant is less pathogenic but with greater infectivity, allowing Omicron to replace Delta, this would be very positive.”

The WHO warned that preliminary evidence suggests the variant has an increased risk of reinfection and may spread more rapidly than other strains, including Delta.

They said there is early evidence to suggest Omicron has an “increased risk of reinfection” and its rapid spread in South Africa suggests it has a “growth advantage”.

“It is extremely important we need to closely monitor the clinical data of Omicron patients in South Africa and worldwide,” Van Ranst stressed.

The variant has more than 30 mutations – around twice as many as the Delta variant – which make it more transmissible and evade the protection given by prior infection or vaccination.

More testing is needed and experts say it can take weeks before a clear picture will emerge.

Nearly two years since the start of the pandemic that has claimed more than 5 million lives around the world, countries are on high alert.

In the Netherlands, 61 people on two flights from Cape Town to South Africa [tested positive](#) for Covid upon arrival in Amsterdam.

Tweaking vaccines

As countries come to terms with the new Omicron variant, work is underway to look at [tweaking existing Covid vaccines](#).

Novavax said it has “already initiated development of a new recombinant spike protein based on the known genetic sequence of Omicron and will have it ready to begin testing and manufacturing within the next few weeks”.

Moderna said: “Since early 2021, Moderna has advanced a comprehensive strategy to anticipate new variants of concern.

“This strategy includes three levels of response should the currently authorized 50 µg (microgram) booster dose of mRNA-1273 prove insufficient to boost waning immunity against the Omicron variant.”

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