

OMICRON SARS-COV-2 VARIATION: A NOVEL CHAPTER IN THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

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On Nov 24, 2021, about 22 months since the first informed case of COVID-19 and after a global estimated 269.5 million cases and 4.9 million deaths. A new SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern (VoC) omicron was appeared. Omicron arisen in a COVID-19-weary world in which anger and frustration with the pandemic are rife amid extensive negative influences on social and economic wellbeing. Previous VoCs appeared in a world in which natural immunity from COVID-19 infections was common. This fifth VoC has emerged at a time when vaccine resistance is increasing in the world. The emergence of the alpha, beta and delta SARS-CoV-2 VoCs were connected with new waves of contaminations sometimes across the whole world. The increased transmissibility of the delta VoC was linked with, amongst others, an advanced viral load. Longer duration of infectiousness and in height rates of reinfection because of its ability to escape from natural immunity which caused in the delta VoC quickly becoming the globally foremost variant [1].

The delta VoC lasts to drive new waves of infection and remnants the dominant VoC during the fourth wave in many countries. Concerns about lower vaccine effectiveness because of new variants have altered our understanding of the COVID-19 end game disenchanting the world of the notion that global vaccination is by itself adequate for regulatory SARS-CoV-2 infection. VoCs have highlighted the importance of vaccination in combination with present public health prevention measures for example masks as a pathway to extreme endemicity [2].

The first sequenced omicron case was conversant from Botswana on 11/11/2021 and a few days later one more sequenced case was conveyed from Hong Kong in a traveller from South Africa. Numerous sequences from South Africa trailed after initial identification that the new variant was related with an S-gene target failure on a specific PCR assay because of a 69–70del deletion analogous to that empirical with the alpha variant [3].

The initial known case of omicron in South Africa was a patient diagnosed with COVID-19 on Nov 12, 2021 although it is likely that there were unidentified cases in numerous countries across the world before then [4]. In South Africa, the mean number of 282 COVID-21 cases per day in the week before the detection of omicron increased to 810 cases per day in the following week, partly qualified to increased surveillance. COVID-19 cases are increasing quickly in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The early doubling time in the fourth wave is higher than that of the previous waves (figure, appendix). The main concerns about omicron include whether it is more infectious or serious than other VoCs and whether it can circumvent vaccine protection. Immunological and clinical data are not yet available to provide conclusive proposal [5].

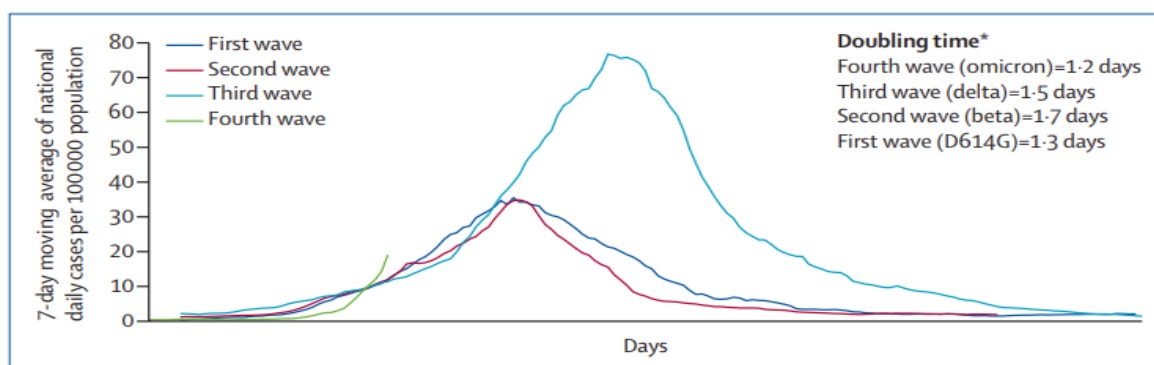


Figure: SARS-CoV-2 cases in first, second, third, and fourth waves, Gauteng Province of South Africa

We can induce from what is known about the mutations of omicron to deliver preliminary indications on transmissibility and immune escape. Omicron has some deletions and more than 31 mutations, several of which (eg, 68–71del, T96I, G145D/146–147del, K417N, T478K, N502Y, N654Y, N679K, and P682H) overlay with those in the alpha α , beta β , gamma γ , or delta δ) VoCs. These deletions and mutations are known to lead

to augmented transmissibility developed viral binding empathy and higher antibody outflow. Some of the other omicron mutations with known effects confer increased transmissibility and move required attraction [6]. The effects of most of the remaining omicron mutations are not known succeeding in a high level of doubt about how the full combination of removals and mutations will affect viral behaviour and vulnerability to natural and vaccine-mediated immunity [7].

The effect of omicron on transmissibility is a concern. The imbrication omicron mutations maintain their known effects. Higher transmissibility is expected mainly because of the mutations near the fur in cleavage site. Early epidemiological indication suggests that cases are rising in South Africa and that PCR tests with S-gene target failure are also rising. Although omicron is probable to be highly transmissible. It is not yet clear whether it has greater transmissibility than delta although preliminary indications suggest that it is scattering quickly against a backdrop of ongoing delta-variant transmission and high levels of natural immunity to the delta variant. This tendency continues omicron is anticipated to displace delta as the foremost variant in South Africa [8].

We await knowledge of how this new VoC will influence clinical presentation. The available anecdotal data from clinicians at the front lines in South Africa recommend that patients with omicron are younger people with a scientific presentation similar to that of past variants. Although no distressing clinical concerns have been raised thus far this anecdotal information should be treated with caution given that severe COVID-19 cases characteristically present several weeks after the initial symptoms associated with mild disease [9].

Immune leakage is another concern. In the absence of data on experimental vaccine effectiveness and antibody-neutralisation studies on vaccinee sera preliminary data from the national PCR testing programme could matter some evidences. Data on positive PCR tests in people with previous positive tests suggest an upsurge in cases of reinfection in South Africa [10].

The increased use of fast antigen tests and incomplete capturing of negative results have complicated the interpretation of test positivity rates which have risen to about four times the preceding rate in the past week. Notwithstanding this restraint the increase in cases of reinfection is in keeping with the immune-escape mutations present in omicron [11].

Although there are conflicting reports on whether COVID-19 vaccines have dependably retained high efficacy for each of the four VoCs preceding omicron clinical trials have stated lower efficacy for some vaccines in transmission settings in which the beta variant is dominant. Previous alternatives have miserable vaccine effectiveness [12].

The ChAdOx1 vaccine was 72% effective in preventing clinical infections for the D614G variant in the UK. This efficacy decreased to 13% for the beta variant in South Africa. The efficacy of the BNT162b2 vaccine in preventing clinical infections was retained across both the D614G and beta variants. Given that omicron has a larger number of mutations than preceding VoCs. The conceivable effect of omicron on the clinical efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines for minor infections is not clear [13].

Most COVID-19 vaccines have persisted effective in preventing severe COVID-19 hospitalisation and death. All previous variants because this effectiveness might be more dependent on T-cell immune responses than antibodies. Observational studies from Qatar (n=232826) [17] and Kaiser Permanente (n=3436977) reported vaccine efficacy of more than 92% in preventing hospital admissions throughout delta-variant show even up to 9 months after vaccination. Observational data from the state of New York, USA (n=8833604) indicated high vaccine efficacy in preventing severe disease in people older than 64 years. Varying levels of protection conferred by different vaccines—97% for BNT162b3 [14].

The omicron variant is detectable on widely used PCR stages in South Africa. There is no reason to trust that current COVID-19 treatment protocols and therapeutics would no longer be effective. The possible exception of monoclonal antibodies for which data on the omicron variant's vulnerability are not yet available. Public health prevention measures that have remained effective against past variants should be just as actual against the omicron variant [15].

Extrapolations based on known mutations and preliminary observations should be interpreted with caution. Omicron might spread faster and might escape antibodies more voluntarily than earlier variants. Increasing cases of reinfection and cases of mild advance infections in people who are vaccinated. On the basis of data from previous VoCs people who are vaccinated are possible. A grouping prevention approach of vaccination and public health measures is expected to remain an actual strategy [16].

Reinfection risk

There are still no data on the vaccination position of people infected with omicron. On the basis of its known mutation vaccine makers have articulated confidence that immunisation will continue to protect against the worst outcomes of covid-19 transported on by the new variant. A preprint study posted online by South African researchers originate that it could be more dangerous than other variants to people whose immunity was acquired through preceding infection. The country has experienced three previous waves determined by the original virus the beta variant and the delta variant [17].

In the rapidly building omicron surge—yet to be officially professed a fourth wave—the proportion of new cases involving people who have already skilled covid-19 is more than three times higher than in the second

and third waves. This finding is borne out elsewhere omicron would pose a specific danger in countries with high rates of natural immunity but relatively low rates of vaccination [18].

HIV connection

The South African scientist who identified the omicron variant told that the most plausible story of the variant's origin was that its multiple mutations accumulated in the body of a person with HIV whose compromised immune system struggled to clear the virus for weeks or months. South Africa was beforehand the likely point of origin of the beta variant of concern. As the country has an HIV prevalence of 18% in people aged 15-47. Its large unprocessed population could become a factory of variants for the whole world [19].

With Africa's high HIV occurrence and a continent-wide vaccination rate of under 7%. Travel bans have effectively disciplined South Africa for swiftly notifying the World Health Organization of the variant. The many flight cancellations are now causing a shortage of substances for test kits that South Africa needs to track the omicron surge and WHO warned that they were also preventing the communication of examples abroad [20].

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