



Omicron: A New Variant of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

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Editorial

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Editorial

On November 24, 2021, the B.1.1.529 variant of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) was first reported from South Africa [1]. The first known confirmed B.1.1.529 infected specimen was collected on November 9, 2021 [1]. On November 25, 2021, daily case numbers in South Africa increased quickly with three distinct peaks in reported cases (the latest peak was predominantly the Delta variant) to more than 1,200 cases from 273 cases on November 16, 2021, more than 80% infected cases, including first case were in the northern province of Gauteng [2]. Currently, this variant is spreading globally [2].

On November 26, 2021, the Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution (TAG-VE), an independent group of experts was convened to evaluate the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) variant-B.1.1.529 [1]. The TAG-VE indicates that this SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) variant has a large number of mutations, around 50 mutations, including more than 30 in the spike protein [2] with some concerns [1]. One of the three target genes is not detected (S gene target failure or S gene

dropout or S gene negative) by the reverse-transcriptase-polymerase-chain reaction (false negative result) [1,2] that can be used as a “surrogate marker” to allow targeting the genome sequencing [2]. Based on epidemiological change in COVID-19, the TAG-VE has suggested World Health Organization (WHO) to designate this variant as a variant of concern, and the WHO named this variant “Omicron”. An increased risk of reinfection with this variant was indicated by the preliminary evidence, in comparison to other variants of concern [1].

In conclusion, based on several ongoing studies, the TAG-VE will continuously assesses this variant of concern.

References

1. (2021) World Health Organization. Classification of Omicron (B.1.1.529): SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Concern.
2. Torjesen I (2021) COVID-19: Omicron may be more transmissible than other variants and partly resistant to existing vaccines, scientists fear. *BMJ* 375: 2943.

