



Effective Measures for Controlling the Spread of the New COVID-19 Variant in Nigeria

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As the world grapple with the emergence of the new COVID-19 variant, researchers have equally expressed serious concern about the impact of this new strain. Scientists working at the South African National Institute for Communicable Disease confirmed this new B.1.1.529 variant of SARS-CoV-2 to the World Health Organization, which WHO later named OMICRON and subsequently declared VARIANT OF CONCERN. Omicron presents unique features such as a longer incubation period, multiple mutations at spike proteins this necessitates the need for urgent and critical action to bolster the existing non-pharmaceutical covid measures already in place. Scientists across the globe express worries regarding transmissibility, virulence and evasion of vaccine-induced immunity. World Health Organization has further stressed the need for more research to unravel the needed information on the variant.

A growing number of countries have reported confirmed cases of the Omicron variant as of 29/11/2021, 14 countries have confirmed cases. The United Kingdom, which has the largest genomic sequencing and contact tracing capacity, now have nine cases. Though one of the first three index cases in the United Kingdom had previously travelled to Southern African countries, the remaining two have no travel history. Quite a number of cases were reported in England from an individual with no travel history suggesting the strain is highly infectious. The emergence of the Omicron variant overseas reminds us why we need to maintain a careful approach and keep public health measures in place to protect ourselves.

Measure Adopted by Countries:

In a swift response, Countries have adopted various measures to control the Omicron strain from causing healthcare and economic breakdown. Japan and Israel have placed an outright ban on foreign flights into the country until adequate information is available. The United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Netherland, Ireland, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Czech Republic, and Belgium have placed restrictions on flights from the Nine southern African countries on the red flag. China has placed no restrictions yet but carefully monitoring the situation. In addition to the restriction in some countries, the United Kingdom has restored its COVID-19 management measures, such as compulsory face masks in public places and transport, quarantine in a hotel upon entering the county, mandatory day two and day 8 test with a satisfactory negative result.

Policy Measures for Lagos State and Nigeria

The South African National Institute for Communicable Disease has done great work to sequence and isolate the Omicron variant. We strongly believe that the response of the world is not to stigmatize and isolate Southern African countries but to collaborate with Southern African countries in the fight against COVID-19. There is an urgent need to support African countries with COVID-19 vaccines to increase the vaccination rate in Africa and reduce the mutation of the virus. No one is safe until all are safe.



In view of the emergence of the Omicron variant and the increase in travelers during the December holiday period, it is necessary for Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole to join the rest of the globe to strengthen and improve the capacity for efficient diagnostic, effective genomic surveillance, contact tracing, enforcement of COVID-19 rules such as wearing of face masks in public, washing of hands and social distancing. It would be curious to note that the third case of Omicron infection in Hong Kong was a 37-year-old male who travelled from Nigeria. In view of this, GET recommends the measures below to contain and control the spread of the Omicron variant in Nigeria.

Recommended Control Measures

- Deployment of effective PCR kit capable of detecting new B.1.1.529 variant in all our Laboratories
- Deployment of a fast testing kit at the entry point that can detect the new B.1.1529 variant for any suspected case.
- Continuous genomic sequencing of all positive samples across the country
- Efficient contact tracing (using technology) for all incoming passengers into the country
- Compulsory quarantine at designated hotel or accommodation facility for a minimum of 14 days as this strain has a longer incubation period.
- Enforce day 2 and day 8 testing, in addition, to fit to fly PCR testing
- Enforce Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions such as compulsory use of face masks in all public gatherings, ensuring adequate ventilation in closed spaces and maintenance of hygiene measures
- Collaborate with CSOs, and NGOs to create awareness, especially during the festive period.
- Increase access to COVID-19 vaccines and encourage Nigerians to be vaccinated as soon as possible.
- Conduct Virological Investigation and Vaccine Effective Studies to understand better its escape potential against both vaccination and infection-acquired immunity.



Biosecurity, One Health.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

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