



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

COVID-19 Press Briefing

November 30, 2021



WHO SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Concern (VOCs)

WHO name	PANGO lineage*	Earliest documented samples
Alpha	B.1.1.7	9/2020
Beta	B.1.351	5/2020
Gamma	P.1	11/2020
Delta	B.1.617.2	10/2020
Omicron	B.1.1.529	11/2021

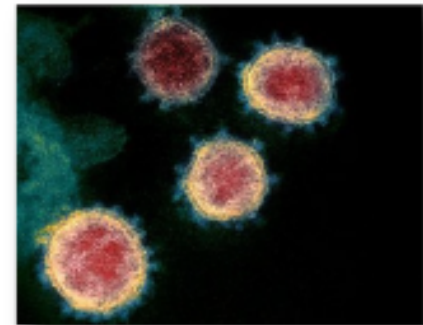
*VOCs also include descendent lineages

Source: WHO



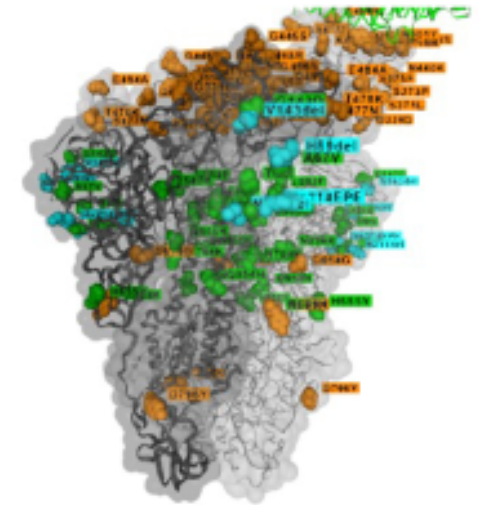
SARS-CoV-2 B.1.1.529 (Omicron) Variant

- **Novel variant first reported in Botswana (11/11) and South Africa (11/14)**
- **Larger number of mutations (~50) than previous variants, some anticipated to impact transmissibility and antibody binding**
- **Variant cases rapidly increased in Gauteng province, South Africa, and present in all other S.A. provinces**
- **Confirmed cases (205) now reported from 18 countries (not yet from USA)**
- **Called 'Omicron' by WHO and named the fifth SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern on 11/26/2021**



Omicron Mutations

- Unusual constellation of changes across the SARS-CoV-2 genome, with >30 mutations in spike protein
- Mutation profile very different from other variants of interest/concern
- Some mutations also found in previous variants (e.g., Delta) and have been associated with increased transmissibility and immune evasion
- Other mutations not well characterized

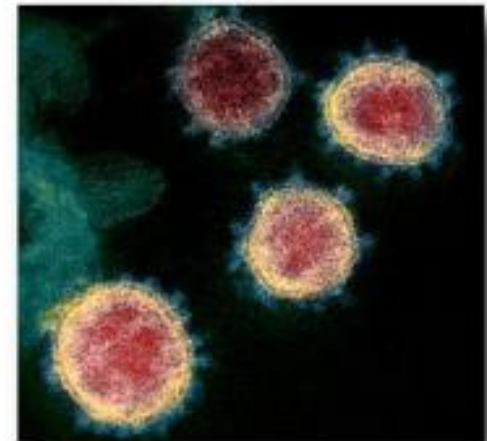


- Variant with documented pheno effects
- Variant (insertions/deletions) with documented pheno effects
- Variant without documented pheno effects

Image source: <https://www.gisaid.org/hcov19-variants/>

Selected USG Omicron Research Activities

- CDC implementing enhanced surveillance via the National SARS-CoV-2 Strain Surveillance (NS3) Program
- Ongoing communication and information-sharing between HHS and South African government
- *In vitro* neutralization data with vaccinee sera, convalescent plasma, monoclonal antibodies, and oral antiviral treatments anticipated in 2 to 4 weeks (possibly sooner)
- Pending these data, the effect of this variant on virus transmission, severity of disease, and how well current vaccines and treatments work remains speculative



Potential Properties of Omicron*

■ Transmission

- May have increased transmission compared to the original pandemic virus
- Difficult to infer if more transmissible than Delta

■ Vaccine effectiveness

- Significant reductions in neutralizing titer possible
- As with other variants, partial immune escape may occur, but vaccines likely will still protect against severe disease

■ Disease severity

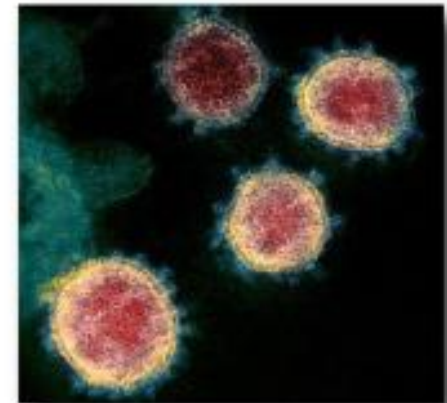
- Severity estimates are difficult given small number of cases
- Preliminary information from South Africa suggests no unusual symptoms associated with variant

*Based on Data for Other Variants with Similar Mutations



How to Fight Omicron

- Get vaccinated
- Get boosted
- Use masks
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces -- choose outdoors rather than indoors when possible
- Keep your distance
- Wash your hands often
- Test -- and isolate if appropriate





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