



Most Omicron cases in South Africa have mild symptoms, COVID shot seems to help: Doctor

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As concerns mount about the Omicron variant of COVID-10, a doctor in South Africa said the strain has been observed in mild forms mainly in people in their 20s and 30s, the Associated Press reported.

Dr Unben Pillay, a general practitioner in the hard-hit Gauteng province, held an online press conference discussing the variant. He told reporters that many patients affected by the strain are being treated from home.

"We've seen a sharp increase in cases over the last 10 days," Pillay said. "Until now, it was mostly very mild cases in which the patients had flu-like symptoms: dry cough, fever, night sweats, a lot of body aches."

He also noted that milder cases emerged in those who were vaccinated against the original virus. However, Pillay also warned that the observations could change as more is known about the strain. This includes effects in older people, who could develop more severe symptoms than those seen in people in their 20s and 30s. This population makes up the majority of current cases in South Africa.

"People who have been vaccinated are usually much better off. We haven't seen a huge increase in hospital admissions, but that's early days," he said. "Hospital admissions often come several days after a spike in confirmed cases."

Scientists have predicted that Omicron is more transmissible than other previous variants like Delta and could affect unvaccinated populations the most, according to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

"Of recent hospital admissions, 87 percent were unvaccinated, 13 percent were vaccinated," said Waasila Jassat, the institute's public health specialist. South Africa has a population of 60 million people of which 16.5 million are fully vaccinated. The country is urging those who don't get vaccinated to do so to help stem the spread of omicron.

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Dr Unben Pillay held an online press conference discussing the Omicron COVID-19 variant in South Africa. He told reporters that many patients with mild symptoms affected by the strain are being treated from home. Above: A healthcare worker prepares a dose of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine from a vial outside a polling station in Laudium, Pretoria, South Africa on November 1, 2021.

It is important to learn more about the Omicron variant as nations around the world tried to contain the new variant with travel bans and other restrictions on Monday, although it remains unclear what the variant will do for the COVID-19 outbreak. pandemic means.

Japan announced it would suspend entry for all foreign visitors, while new cases of the variant, identified days ago by researchers in southern Africa, have been surfacing as far away as Hong Kong, Australia and Portugal. Portuguese authorities are investigating whether some infections there may be among the first reported cases of local transmission of the variant outside southern Africa.

In South Africa, the seven-day average of new cases has risen from about 200 a day to more than 2,000 in the past two weeks. The surge in South Africa could push the daily number of new cases to 10,000 by the end of the week, infectious disease specialist Salim Abdool Karim said at the briefing.

"Our biggest challenge will be to stop super-spreading events, especially indoors," he said, suggesting there may be a need to limit indoor gatherings to those who are vaccinated. The hotspot for the new surge is Gauteng's Tshwane metropolitan area, which includes the capital city of Pretoria.

The number of fully vaccinated people who test positive is very small, said Nicholas Crisp, acting director-general of the health ministry. "It's a very small number of people who have tested positive. It is tiny compared to unvaccinated individuals."

The government does not plan to enact centralized vaccination regulations but will support businesses and organizations seeking proof of vaccination to enter indoor spaces, Health Secretary Joe Phaahla told reporters.

The government is considering requiring vaccines for health workers, including those working in state hospitals, he said. "We are considering specific proposals on how to deal with vaccination requirements in workplaces and in the healthcare workplace," Phaahla said.

Some African countries, including Angola, Egypt, Mauritius and Rwanda, have joined the string of nations that have imposed travel restrictions on South Africa and other southern African countries.

"It is quite unfortunate, very unfortunate and I would even say sad to be talking about travel restrictions imposed by another African country," said Clayson Monyela, spokesman for the Department of International Affairs and Cooperation. He called the decisions "unjustified and unjustified because they are not based on science".



Dr Unben Pillay held an online press conference discussing the Omicron COVID-19 variant in South Africa. He told reporters that many patients with mild symptoms affected by the strain are being treated from home. Above, people wait to receive a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at a center in Soweto on November 29, 2021. AP Photo/Denis Farrell