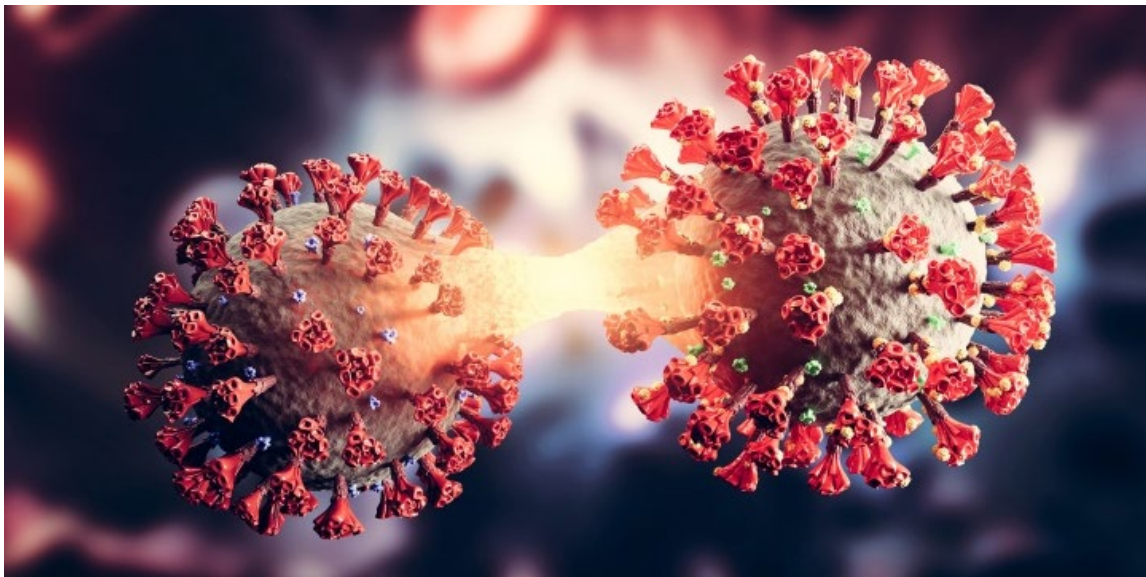


CORONAVIRUS

Fifteen more cases of Covid-19 'Kraken' subvariant detected in South Africa



(Image: iStock)

By Estelle Ellis

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Almost 20 cases of XBB.1.5 – the Omicron subvariant that's been described as the most transmissible to date – have now been identified in South Africa. No data signals show that this specific subvariant will cause more severe disease or increased hospitalisation.

Seventeen confirmed cases of the Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5 have been detected in South Africa since December 2022.

One was found in Gauteng, 13 in the Western Cape, one in the Free State and two in KwaZulu-Natal, according to the latest genomic surveillance report released by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

The [latest report](#) on Covid cases in the country shows 1,499 cases reported for the second week of the year.

XBB.1.5 was first found in January in a random sample taken in December. In the first week of January, [another case](#) was identified. Now there are 15 more.

The Western Cape reported the highest weekly incidence risk (4.1 cases per 100,000 persons), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (3.3 cases per 100,000), the Eastern Cape (2.6 cases per 100,000) and Gauteng (1.9 cases per 100,000).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers an incidence risk of higher than five per 100,000 people indicative of an outbreak that is not under control.

In his update, the director of the Centre for Aids Programme Research in South Africa (Caprisa), Professor Salim Abdool Karim, said South Africa remains in low transmission at present.

He explained that XBB.1.5 has two “key characteristics of new variants of concern” – high transmissibility and immune escape. He said the latest research shows that the XBB.1 sublineage has more immune escape than all of its predecessors:

“XBB.1.5 has been spreading rapidly in the US over the last few weeks and has now become dominant (>50%) ... but the global trends are not showing an expected upward trend if XBB.1.5 is spreading rapidly in many countries as we saw with Omicron BA.1 (another subvariant).”

His advice was to get fully vaccinated and boosted, try to be outdoors as much as possible, and wear a mask when in poorly ventilated indoor areas.

Globally, nearly 2.8 million new cases and more than 13,000 deaths were [reported](#) in the week of 9 to 15 January 2023, according to the WHO.

“In the last 28 days (19 December 2022 to 15 January 2023), nearly 13 million cases and almost 53,000 new deaths were reported globally – a decrease of 7% and an increase of 20%, respectively, compared with the previous 28 days.

“As of 15 January 2023, over 662 million confirmed cases and over 6.7 million deaths have been reported globally,” the latest update reads. **DM/MC**