



PROFESSOR Salim Abdool Karim.

EXPERT

## 'No need to panic over new HIV variant'

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INTERNATIONAL medical experts have announced the discovery of a new HIV variant which is highly transmissible and can cause severe infection; however, according to Dr Salim Abdool Karim, it can be treated with standard ARVs.

Abdool Karim, a leading clinical infectious diseases epidemiologist, said that while the newly discovered HIV variant can spread faster than its predecessor, it can be treated with standard antiretroviral medication.

He was speaking to eNCA yesterday, just days after international medical teams announced the discovery of the HIV variant, VB, discovered in the Netherlands.

He said there is no cause for concern, as although VB is able to cause more severe infection, it is treatable.

Abdool Karim explained that both HIV and the coronavirus are RNA viruses.

He said HIV can convert its RNA into DNA and while doing so, makes mistakes, thus causing many mutations.

"We haven't been able to identify individual variants or strains that are presenting and creating a different kind of clinical form and that's what VB does. VB is able to cause more severe infection. Fortunately, it is readily amenable and treatable with all the standard antiretrovirals."

According to reports, those infected with the VB variant have an average viral load that is about four times higher than is usual for HIV infection, and their immune system declines twice as fast, placing them at risk of developing Aids more quickly.

UNAIDS notes that 28.2 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy as of June 30, 2021 and about 37.7 million people globally were living with HIV in 2020. In that year about 1.5 million people contracted HIV.