NO NEED FOR PANIC

SA ‘in good space’ with Covid strain

“In South Africa, we are in a really good position, except if you have some sort of underlying medical condition and you are above the age of 60 to 65. If you haven’t received a booster vaccine in the past 12 months, that will be highly recommended.”

“The new strain is more infectious than previous variants, and it is expected to spread fast, not just in South Africa, but across the world.”

Despite this, Abdoel Karim, who is also the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa, explained that the more infectious EG.5 Covid-19 strain would not require emergency measures as he urged against widespread panic.

“We don’t expect the hospitals to be full, like we witnessed when the pandemic first started, because the Covid-19 vaccines work, and it is the best protection against the new strain.”

He said that at least three doses of the vaccine were encouraged, with the fourth being a booster, particularly for those who were elderly or had compromised immune systems.

He also urged those who were infected by the new strain to wear a mask when in public, to avoid going to work or school for about three to five days and for people in general to try to do as much as they could outdoors.

The world renowned epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim said while there was no need to panic, it was inevitable that the new strain would spread in South Africa.

“We live in an interconnected world, so it should come as no surprise when the new variant spreads in South Africa,” said Abdool Karim.

“EG.5 is now substantially different to Omicron because parts of our immunity do not fully recognise this strain.”

He said the human body’s immune system was made up of T-Cells and B-Cells.

“T-Cells make antibodies and T-Cells kill the virus, but what is happening with EG.5 is significantly different to previous strains like Omicron.”

“The first difference is that the B-Cells don’t fully recognise the new strain, and our antibodies are then not as effective against the new variant, but the T-Cells recognise it and kill the virus.”

He said that T-Cells could not prevent infections and only came into effect after someone had been infected.

“The good news is that the T-Cells are able to deal with the new variant, but the not so good news is that EG.5 is able to escape some of the antibodies and, as a result, is able to cause a large number of infections.”

Despite news of the new Covid-19 variant, Abdool Karim said scientists had been expecting a new strain.

“We didn’t know when it was going to happen and what it would look like, but we are pleased that our immunity is holding us in good stead.

“The virus is not done with us, and we are still living in the midst of a pandemic.”