

Is the new strain of Coronavirus more dangerous & contagious?

DR ZUBAIR KHALED HUQ

While Coronavirus continues to wreak havoc in our lives, the new strain has spread panic among people not only in England but even outside. Scientists are working hard to track the origin of the new virus, but nothing has been confirmed yet. The even horrifying news is that the new virus is 56 per cent more contagious, as per the experts.

According to a recent study, the new virus is more contagious and can spread at a faster pace. An initial analysis of the new variant has been published and identifies 17 potentially important alterations. There have been changes to the spike protein - this is the key the virus uses to unlock the doorway to our body's cells. Due to increased transmission, the number of cases is also going to go up. Experts fear that this can lead to more COVID related hospitalisation and deaths in the year 2021 as compared to the year 2020.

Where has it come from? The variant is unusually highly mutated. The most likely explanation is the variant has emerged in a patient with a weakened immune system that was unable to beat the virus. Instead, their body became a breeding ground for the virus to mutate. Does it make the infection more deadly?

Experts also said that easing the lockdown rules will prompt a large resurgence of the virus, which means it may become necessary to accelerate the vaccine roll-out to suppress the burden of the disease. The new strain of the COVID-19 virus was discovered in



southeast England in November after which the British government imposed the restrictions in the UK and nearby areas.

With the new variant of the virus, the three most common symptoms of fever, dry cough and loss of smell and taste remain the same. But there are seven other symptoms that have been associated with the new variant. The symptoms include fatigue, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, headache, muscle pain and mental confusion. The mutation of the virus has made it easy to enter the human cells, which makes children more prone to getting infected and equally susceptible to the virus as adults. With the new strain in the picture, we might see more children getting infected with the virus.

Three things are coming together that means it is attracting attention: It is rapidly replacing other versions of the virus. It has mutations that affect the part of the

virus likely to be important. Some of those mutations have already been shown in the lab to increase the ability of the virus to infect cells. All of these come together to build a case for a virus that can spread more easily. However, we do not have absolute certainty. New strains can become more common simply by being carried back to Bangladesh by anyone.

Another study showed the variant of the virus may be up to 70% more transmissible. How far has it spread?

However, just increasing transmission would be enough to cause problems for hospitals. If the new variant means more people are infected more quickly, that would, in turn, lead to more people needing hospital treatment.

Will the vaccines work against the new variant? Yes, at least for now. All three leading vaccines develop an immune response against the existing spike, which

is why the question comes up. Vaccines train the immune system to attack several different parts of the virus, so even though part of the spike has mutated, the vaccines should still work.

If more mutations are added, then definitely it is worrying. This virus will be then on a potential pathway for vaccine escape, it has taken the first couple of steps towards that. Vaccine escape happens when the virus changes so it dodges the full effect of the vaccine and continues to infect people. This may be the most concerning element of what is happening with the virus.

For personal protection in the new normal life, we should continue to maintain social distancing, wearing a mask, and maintaining etiquette have to be the order of the day. If we can stop entering the virus from one to other it will die automatically. To protect anyone from reinfection one thing must be cleared. If you are once infected, everyone is not equally symptomatic. Antibody titre depends on virus load and gravity of symptoms. So if there is a lack of antibody, reinfection will be a probability.

This variant is just the latest to show the virus is continuing to adapt as it infects more and more of us. The virus will probably be able to generate vaccine escape mutants. That would put us in a position similar to flu, where the vaccines need to be regularly updated. Fortunately, the vaccines we have are very easy to tweak, is solace for the mind.

The writer is a gerontologist and a public health specialist. E-mail: zubairkhaledjy@gmail.com

PERSPECTIVE

Mask is must

Today's talk of the globe is 'vaccine'. People are very excited and also confused about their happiness on this issue! Although we are aware of at least 6 vaccines around the world, but unconfident about their exact efficacy and duration. Well, whether we administer vaccines or not; there is no compromise with the 'face mask'. This is an essential tool to achieve a 'COVID - combat life'. Unfortunately, a lot of people still do not give importance to this. As well as we need to know - 'When should we replace our COVID-19 Mask'?

It is said that if you can blow out a candle through your face mask, it is too thin to be effective. Another option is to blow through the mask and see if you feel your breath. Mask materials can become thinner the more you wash them, and thinner fabric provides a weaker barrier to the transmission of COVID-19.

Although all face masks are not made the same, but to preserve a mask, it is important to wash it correctly. At the same time, we also need to recognize carefully when they've reached the end of their lifespan.

If you have been wearing your mask for a while and the fit is starting to loosen - especially if the mask no longer securely covers your nose and mouth - it must be replaced. Our masks need to fit securely under the chin, across the cheeks and around the nose; that is, it should not have any gaps at all. It is important to look out for the mask's straps that keep it in place; if these ties become loose or stretched, we need to stop using it straight away; otherwise we could be putting ourselves and others in danger of COVID.

With this in mind, it is always important to look out for the signs that our masks are no longer safely filtering out the respiratory droplets that carry the virus. But remember always, washing hands before/after using 'mask' is more important than just wearing a mask. And time to time you need to take off your mask for oxygen.

E-mail: rubaiulmushed@gmail.com

HEALTH bulletin

Addressing pandemic fatigue

KAZI MD SHAIMUL REZA

It is hard to not be appalled by the sheer apathy many people are showing towards the health measures put in place to fight the pandemic - masks are barely seen covering both nose and mouth of the wearer properly, if at all; droves of people are casually visiting entertainment hubs and tourist spots with absolute disregard for social-distancing; weddings and parties are coming to pass in full throttle without remotely adhering to the health recommendations.

Even with the rollout of vaccines in many parts of the globe, there is no apparent end to the pandemic in sight - the number of cases and deaths continue to dart off the charts in many places with hospitals operating dreadfully close to their maximum capacities.

Yet, communities are now much less cautious than before. Months of persistent physical and emotional stress augmented by stringent blankets of restrictions have desensitised them. The caution has given in to exhaustion, as people are drained from being alert for too long. 'Pandemic fatigue' is becoming a burning concern.

While such a response is understandable, it exacerbates the crisis by accelerating viral transmission, putting not only those neglectful of the health measures but also others around them in danger. The undue stress is negatively impacting mental health, with a spike in depression, anxiety and burnout. Thus this issue needs prompt addressing.

'The new normal' narrative needs to be presented in a way that makes it feel less forced; it should be portrayed as a healthy, positive reform of our lifestyles that is not necessarily bounded by the pandemic's timeline. Following

proper health measures ward off not only COVID-19 but also infectious diseases and thus improve the general well-being of populations.

It is important to inspire people to look at the bigger picture - the violation of rules stretch the crisis further. Wearing masks, practicing frequent hand washing and maintaining social distance help us exercise some degree of control amidst the uncertainty of this crisis. Such actions also show that we are mindful of the safety of those around us.

While rigorous enactment of laws penalising violations needs to be operational, it is equally important to boost the public morale, by sensitising them to the repercussions of their actions through stories that resonate with them, via print, broadcasting and internet media. This also entails fighting the misinformation trivialising the

need for taking precautions and advocating 'going easy'.

Framing policies that are not overbearing but strike the right balance between curbing personal liberty and inspiring social responsibility should be prioritised. Running targeted campaigns tailored to the diverse circumstances of communities can effectively offer them the required mental stimulation and make them feel actively involved. Equally important is inspiring their confidence in the administration by ensuring transparency in health policies, interventions and the sharing of crucial information.

A catastrophe like this demands wholehearted collective efforts - attempting to proceed without securing all bases will only drop us back to square one.

Kazi Md Shaimul Reza is a medical student. E-mail: shaimul.rd@gmail.com



Diet and lifestyle changes lower risk for GERD symptoms in women

Although clinicians commonly recommend diet and lifestyle modifications to prevent gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) symptoms, few prospective data inform these recommendations. Researchers used Nurses' Health Study data to determine associations between dietary and lifestyle factors and risk for developing GERD symptoms in 43,000 women without baseline GERD.

During 10 years of follow-up, 9,300 women reported new GERD symptoms at least once weekly. After adjustment for multiple variables, five antireflux lifestyle factors were associated independently with lower risk for GERD symptoms: not smoking; drinking ≤ 2 cups of coffee, tea, or soda daily; a "prudent" diet (i.e., high intake of fruits, vegetables, legumes, fish, poultry, and whole grains); ≥ 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily; and normal weight (body-mass index, 25 kg/m^2).

Adherence to more of these antireflux factors was associated with less GERD risk. Women who adhered to all five factors had only half the risk for GERD as did women who adhered to none. Similar results were obtained for regular users of histamine-2 (H2)-blockers and proton-pump inhibitors (PPIs).

Adherence to antireflux lifestyle factors was associated with lower risk for GERD symptoms in women - even among H2-blocker and PPI users.

For patients with GERD symptoms, clinicians should recommend smoking cessation; avoidance of coffee, tea, and soda; a prudent diet; regular exercise; and weight loss, regardless of whether antireflux drugs are prescribed.



Brain boosting beverages

In our daily life, we take many kind of beverages. We hardly think about their health benefits. Here are a few juices and drinks that may boost your brain health.

Coffee: The caffeine in coffee makes you more alert. A cup of joe can also help you concentrate and boost your mood when you have got the Monday blues. Plus, lifelong coffee drinkers may have a lower risk of stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

Green tea: If you are not a coffee drinker, this nutty-flavoured beverage is another way to get your daily caffeine. Like coffee, tea can make you feel more alert. There is also evidence that the green stuff improves memory and attention.

Turmeric tea: This yellow spice is a main ingredient in curry, and it adds an earthy flavour to tea. Turmeric has been a part of Chinese and Indian medicine for centuries. Thanks to its anti-inflammatory properties, turmeric is useful for skin, joint, and digestive issues. Researchers are now looking at its protective effects on the brain and whether it might improve memory and slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Beetroot juice: Beets are a root vegetable. Their juice is high in antioxidants that protect against damaging substances in the body called free radicals. It also has nitrates that relax blood vessels and may help to reduce high blood pressure - a risk for stroke and dementia. Plus, this sweet and earthy juice helps fight fatigue.

Lemon water: Your whole body needs water, including your brain. When you are dehydrated, your mental function suffers. Water makes up 75% of your brain's volume and acts as a natural shock absorber. Add a squeeze of lemon to your glass of water for both flavour and nutrition. Lemon has plant nutrients that protect your cells from damage. Plus, some people find that its scent improves their mood.

Source: WebMD

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156,775 new patient diagnosed
108,990 died

United Hospital
Vanguard in shaping the cancer care of Bangladesh

*Globocan Report

Plot 15 Road 71
 Gulshan Dhaka 1212

Appointment
 02 22 22 62 466 | **10666**

www.uhlbd.com
 facebook/uhlbd
 info@uhlbd.com

