



OUR REF: NCDC/HQ/ABJ /PA/ V.1/1

DATE: December 7, 2024

Public Advisory

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) considers it necessary to make this statement to allay the fears created in the public space about the Covid-19 variant reportedly in circulation in Australia. The recent detection of the SARS-CoV-2 **XEC sub-variant**—a descendant of the Omicron lineage—has highlighted the ongoing evolution of the COVID-19 virus.

For the information of our people, there are many variants of SARS-COVID-2 being monitored globally. Currently, the **JN.1**, classified as the **Variant of Interest (VOI)**, is now reported in 132 countries, including the United States, India, Australia, the United Kingdom, China, New Zealand, Thailand, Canada, and Singapore, and Nigeria. A VOI is not yet deemed to pose serious risk. The XEC is a subvariant of JN.1 and has been designated as the **Variant Under Monitoring (VUMs)** i.e. being watched for potential concerns and not considered to pose a significant risk, and not yet meet the criteria for designation as VOI.

There has been a reported rise in COVID-19 cases linked to the XEC variant, which has been detected so far in 43 countries across different continents, Europe, Asia, North America and recently in Botswana, Africa. Though the JN.1 has been reported in Nigeria since January 2024, **the XEC variant which are descendants of the Omicron lineage JN.1 are yet to be detected in Nigeria.**

The JN.1 sub-variants are dominant globally and are the fastest growing among currently circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2. The XEC subvariant has exhibited higher transmissibility as compared to other variants but has not shown evidence of increased severity.

The National COVID-19 Technical Working Group (COVID-19 TWG) continues to monitor and conduct analyses of surveillance data both internationally and across the country to guide public health response activities. In line with our emergency preparedness and response strategy, we have continuously upgraded and updating our strategies and capabilities (surveillance, detection, stockpiling, training inclusive) for a quick and effective response. Along this line, a dynamic risk assessment / readiness assessment is being organized to guide us in developing a plan of action. Meanwhile, we urge all health facilities, both public and private, to increase the testing for COVID-19 on suspected patients. All positive samples are encouraged to be sent to the NCDC laboratory and other public health accredited laboratories for sequencing.

Advice to the Public

We urge citizens, including media practitioners, to share only verified information responsibly. **There is no need for unnecessary anxiety or panic.** COVID-19 remains a significant risk, particularly for the elderly, individuals with underlying chronic illnesses, those undergoing cancer treatment, organ transplant recipients, and individuals with suppressed immune systems.

To protect yourself, your friends, and your family:

We advise the public to continue to adhere to the basic public health safety measures and simple precautions such as:

- **Maintaining Good Personal Hygiene:** Wash hands regularly with soap and running water, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- **Covering your mouth and nose** with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or into a bent elbow
- **Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer** containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- **Wear Masks:** If you have flu-like symptoms such as coughing or sneezing, or if you are at risk of severe disease, use a mask in crowded and high-risk situations.
- **Physical distancing, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoid crowds**
- **Stay Vigilant:** Be alert for COVID-19 symptoms, which include fever, cough, headache, nausea, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, sore throat, fatigue, new loss of taste or smell. Seek medical advice promptly if you develop such symptoms or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or similar symptoms.
- **Get Tested:** For any febrile illness and respiratory symptoms, prompt testing can help identify cases with a high risk of severe
- **Get Vaccinated:** Ensure you and your family members are fully vaccinated and receive booster doses as recommended.

Healthcare Workers:

As frontline defenders of our system, healthcare workers are encouraged to:

1. Test patients presenting with respiratory or febrile symptoms, as mentioned earlier. SARS COV-2 positive samples should be promptly sent for genomic sequencing to aid national monitoring efforts.
2. Consistently practice hand hygiene, use personal protective equipment (PPE), and follow hospital-based infection prevention and control (IPC) measures to limit disease spread.

State Governments and Policy Makers:

State governments play a critical role in ensuring the public health infrastructure is responsive and resilient. More strategic measures to address the evolving public health concern includes the need to:

1. Support public health systems in the state including laboratories and healthcare facilities with resources to improve surveillance and diagnostic capabilities, while ensuring the existing treatment centers are in ready condition, in addition to our support.
2. Promote public health campaigns to educate communities about preventive measures and the importance of seeking medical attention early.

As the country's National Public Health Institute and in line with our mandate, the NCDC will continue to monitor the global situation and provide Nigerians with scientifically sound and evidence-based information on any changes in SARS-CoV-2 epidemiology and genomics that may threaten public health.

Contact

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Signed:



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