

Centre: 40-odd Delta-plus cases reported from 3 states

‘It’s Sporadic, No Increase In Prevalence’

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New Delhi:

Around 40 cases of Delta-plus variant – now classified as ‘Variant of Concern’ - have been detected from Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, raising concerns about the threat it poses even as its properties including transmissibility and virulence are being investigated.

“As of now among the samples sequenced (45,000+) in India, Delta-plus variant AY.1 has been observed sporadically in Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, with around 40 cases identified so far and no significant increase in prevalence,” the health ministry said on Wednesday.

However, it is likely that cases infected with the new Delta-plus variant are not confined to these three states, official sources said amid reports of some being detected in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh as well. The Centre on Tuesday issued advisory to Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh to immediately step up containment measures to curb the spread. These states were also asked to send more positive samples for genome sequencing.

The Delta-plus variant [B.1.617.2.1/ (AY.1)] is characterized by the K417N mutation in Spike protein - which aids the virus to gain receptor-mediated entry into human cells, according to the INSACOG report. The mutation K417N has been of interest as it is present in the Beta variant (B.1.351 lineage), which was reported to have immune evasion property. The role of AY.1’s in immune escape, disease severity or increased transmissibility. is under continued surveillance, the ministry said.

Officials said even if the variant has higher transmissibility, the measures to fight it remain the same, stressing on the need to wear masks, follow hand hygiene and maintain physical distancing including avoiding of crowds.

Though the confirmed number of cases that are infected by Delta-plus variant are still low in India, officials and public health experts are concerned because it is likely to have high transmissibility as it is a variant of Delta (B.1.617.2) – which has identified as the most transmissible variant of SARS-CoV2 so far. Apart from India, cases of Delta-plus variant have been detected in nine other countries – US, UK, Portugal, Poland, Nepal, Switzerland, Japan, China and Russia.

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Passengers observe social distancing on a train run by MMTS which restarted services on Monday in Hyderabad after a 15-month gap