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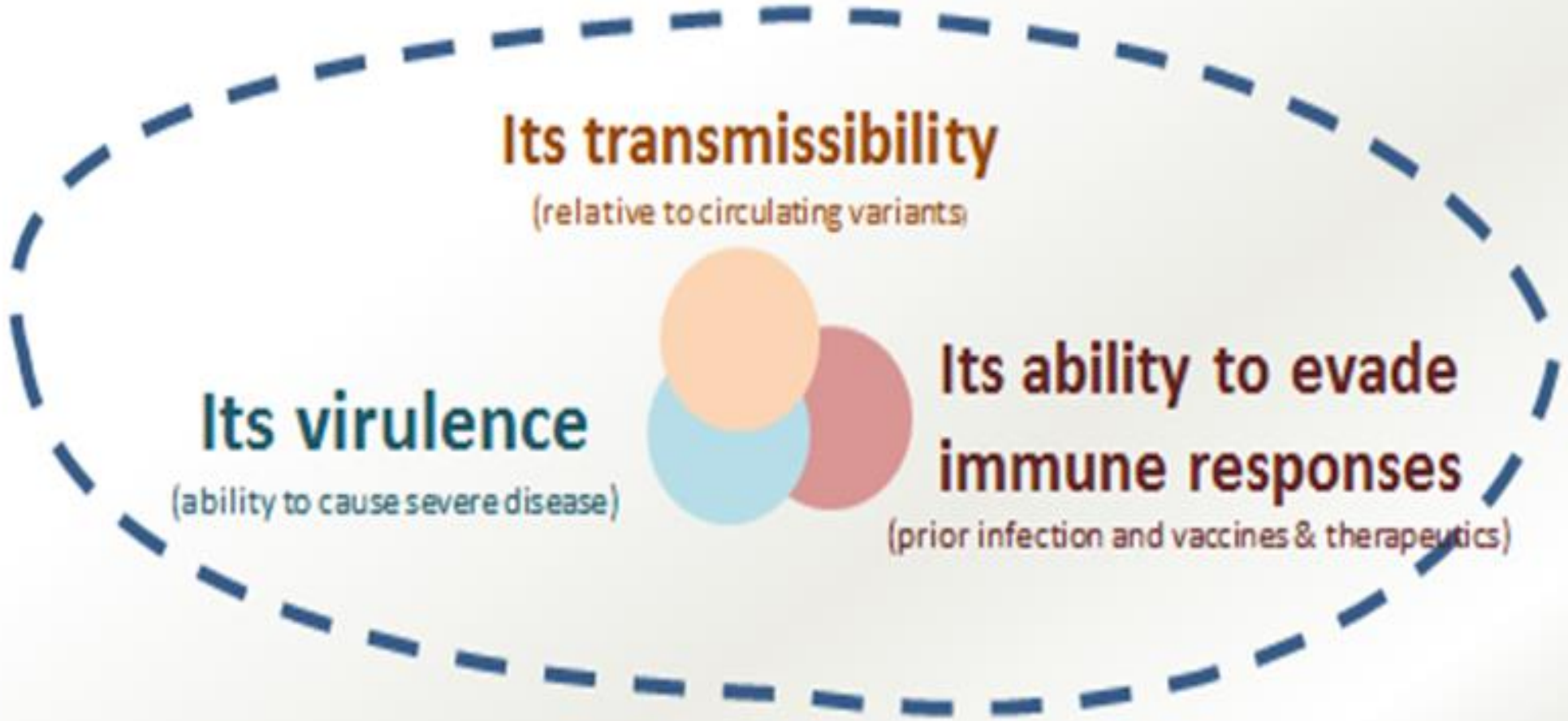
Update on

SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern Omicron

Three key properties of a variant are likely to influence the overall threat from it



https://www.who.int/groups/technical-advisory-group-on-covid-19-vaccine-composition/tag-covvac

What is the Omicron variant?

The Omicron variant of COVID-19 has been called a variant of concern by WHO based on the evidence that it has several **mutations** that may have an impact on how it behaves.

There is consistent evidence that Omicron is **spreading** significantly **faster** than the Delta variant in countries with documented community transmission, with a doubling time of 2-3 days.

The **overall risk** related to this new variant remains **very high**.

SARS-CoV-2 variants of interest and variants of concern

SARS-CoV-2 variant of interest (VOI)

- **A variant with genetic changes that are predicted or known to affect virus characteristics such as transmissibility, disease severity, immune escape, diagnostic or therapeutic escape; AND**
- **Causes community transmission or multiple COVID-19 cases/clusters in multiple countries with increasing relative prevalence or other epidemiological impacts to suggest an emerging risk to global public health**

SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern (VOC)

- **Meets the definition of a VOI** and, through a comparative assessment, has been associated with one or more of the following changes at a degree of global public health significance:

➢ **increase in transmissibility** or detrimental change in COVID-19 epidemiology; OR
➢ **increase in virulence** or change in clinical disease presentation; OR
➢ **decrease in effectiveness of public health and social measures** or available diagnostics, vaccines, therapeutics

Is the Omicron variant more severe than other COVID-19 variants?

Early findings suggest that there is a reduced risk of **hospitalization** for Omicron compared to the **Delta** variant. But WHO warns that it should not be dismissed as “mild.

Increased ***transmission is expected*** to lead to more hospitalizations. That increase causes strain on frontline workers and healthcare systems, which in turn can result in more deaths

Is the Omicron variant more contagious?

Yes, the Omicron variant is more contagious than previous variants. However, being vaccinated and taking precautions such as avoiding crowded spaces, keeping your distance from others and wearing a mask are critical in helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and we know these actions have been effective against other variants.

Does the Omicron variant cause different symptoms?

There is no information to suggest that Omicron causes different COVID-19 symptoms from other COVID-19 variants.

Frequency of COVID-19 symptoms by variant

SYMPTOM	OMICRON	DELTA	PRE-DELTA
Runny nose	Common	Common	Sometimes
Headache	Common	Common	Common
Fatigue	Common	Common	Common
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes	Rare
Sore throat	Common	Common	Sometimes
Persistent cough	Sometimes	Common	Common
Chills or shivers	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Fever	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common

The top 5 symptoms in both periods were:

runny nose
headache
fatigue (mild or severe)
sneezi
sore throat

Are the COVID-19 vaccines effective against the Omicron variant?

Researchers are looking into any potential impact the Omicron variant has on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. Information is still limited, but there may be a small reduction in the effectiveness of vaccines against severe illness and death, and a decline in preventing mild disease and infection. However, WHO reports that so far it looks like the currently available vaccines offer significant protection against severe disease and death.

Is a prior COVID-19 infection effective against the Omicron variant?

WHO reports that early evidence suggests that previous infection could offer less protection against Omicron in comparison to other variants of concern, such as Delta.

You **should** get vaccinated even if you've **previously** had COVID-19. While people who recover from COVID-19 may develop some natural immunity to the virus, we do not yet know how long it lasts or how well you are protected. Vaccines **offer more reliable** protection.

Do current COVID-19 tests detect the Omicron variant?

The widely used PCR and antigen-based rapid diagnostic tests continue to detect infection of COVID-19, including Omicron.

How can I protect myself and my family against the Omicron variant?

Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth.
Make sure that your hands are clean when you put on and remove your mask.
Keep a physical distance of at least 1 metre from others.
Avoid poorly ventilated or crowded spaces.
Open windows to improve ventilation indoors.
Wash your hands regularly.
When it's your turn, get vaccinated. WHO-approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.

Current knowledge about Omicron

Transmissibility:
It is not yet clear whether Omicron is more transmissible, causes more or less severe disease compared to other variants, or impacts the effectiveness of current COVID-19 vaccines

Reinfection:
Preliminary evidence suggests there may be an increased risk of reinfection with Omicron, however information is limited*

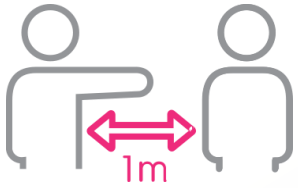
Detection:
Diagnostic tests, including PCR and antigen detection tests, continue to detect infection with Omicron

Clinical management:
Corticosteroids and IL-6 receptor blockers do not target the spike protein and are still effective for managing patients with severe COVID-19

While characteristics of Omicron are being studied, evidence shows that COVID-19 vaccines are still effective to protect against severe disease due to current circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants, including Delta

Preventive measures effectively reduce the risk of COVID-19, including Delta and Omicron

Preventive measures continue to be effective and should continue to be implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19



Keep a physical distance of at least 1 metre from others

Wear a well-fitting mask

Open windows to improve ventilation

Avoid poorly ventilated or crowded spaces

Wash hands frequently

Cough or sneeze into a bent elbow or tissue

Get vaccinated, when it is your turn

COVID-19 protective measures

Protect yourself & others