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16
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Six cases with new UK virus variant found

States race to track returnees; panel set up to pick vaccine recipients

KALYAN RAY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

India on Tuesday reported its first six cases of the new, more infectious Covid-19 variant in people who returned from the UK recently, as authorities scrambled to track and test thousands of such returnees spread across the country.

While those who have tested positive for the new strain would have to stay at government isolation facilities for the next 28 days, state governments face a herculean task of tracking down nearly 33,000 individuals who returned from the UK between November 25 and December 23.

"A total of 6 samples of 6 UK returnee persons have been found to be positive with the new UK variant genome. Three samples were tested positive at the National Institute of Mental Health and



An apartment was sealed in Vasanthpura after a mother-daughter duo tested positive. DH PHOTO/PUSHKAR V

India to extend UK flight ban

India is likely to extend "slightly" the temporary suspension of flights from Britain imposed to contain the spread of the mutant strain of coronavirus prevalent there, said Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri. "I foresee a small extension to the temporary suspension," said Puri.

Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, two in the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, and one in the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune," the Union Health Ministry said in a statement.

"All these individuals have been kept in single room isolation in designated healthcare facilities by state governments and their close contacts have been put under quarantine,"

the statement added.

K Vijayraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor to the government, assured that vaccines would work against the new strain.

"All vaccines target multiple regions of the virus, most of which were not impacted by these 17 mutations. The changes in the variants are not sufficient to make the vaccines ineffective," he said.

► UK virus, Page 5

Six-year-old girl, mother from Bengaluru have new strain

SURAKSHA P
BENGALURU, DHNS

Two UK returnees — a 34-year-old woman and her six-year-old daughter — have tested positive for the new variant of the coronavirus in Bengaluru, the Union Health Ministry announced on Tuesday.

The girl, her mother and father arrived in Bengaluru on Dec 19 and were admitted to the Trauma and Emergency Care Centre (TECC) on Victoria Hospital campus on Dec 22.

They were both asymptomatic at the time of admission. While the child tested negative twice for Covid in a 24-hour period, her mother tested positive again.

"It has been a week since the mother-daughter duo came here," said Dr Smitha Segu, nodal officer for Covid-19, BMCRI.

► New strain, Page 5
BBMP seals apartment, Page 2

Six cases with new UK virus variant...

UK VIRUS, FROM PAGE 1

At 30/12/22
A network of 10 laboratories has been set up to carry out the genetic sequencing of not only those who returned from the UK but also 5% of other RT-PCR positive samples to find out about the other types of mutations that strains circulating in India underwent.

"In the last 11 months, there were more than 5,000 sequencing, which did not reveal any virus drift or shift," said Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan.

Vaccine panel

Meanwhile, the Centre has formed an expert panel to decide the criteria for selecting the 27 crore potential recipients of the Covid-19 vaccine after one crore doctors and two crore frontline workers

receive their shots.

The 12-member panel comprising specialist doctors of kidney, lungs, heart diseases and cancer would finalise the parameters based on which the recipients would be chosen.

While age and comorbidity are the determining factors, the experts would also take into account the severity of a disease. For instance, mild hypertension being experienced by nearly 30% Indians would not be counted as a comorbidity factor, but severe hypertension would be.

"In the next few days, the expert panel is likely to submit its report, based on which the national task force on vaccination would take a decision," said NITI Ayog member Vinod Paul, who heads the task force.