



Covid-19: Is Omicron Led Third Wave Impending in India?

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 cases, particularly of the Omicron strain, are on the rise around the world, including in India. In this piece, I attempted to appraise India's status in light of the impending third wave. Based on what is known about the new variant, there is a low likelihood that it would generate a third wave as large as the second one in India. In terms of host immunity, India is in a better position. It also looks that the health-care system is in a better position than the second wave.

Keywords: Covid-19, Omicron, India, Immunity

The global community is concerned about a new form of the SARS Cov 2 virus, which was initially discovered in South Africa on November 24. On November 26, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the virus, known as Omicron (B.1.1.529), as a Variant of Concern (VOC).¹ Apart from South Africa; it has been documented in a number of countries throughout the world, including India.

So far, the epidemiological and clinical evidence from South Africa indicates that it is extremely infectious. With calculated R0 (rate of infection) of 2.0, the Omicron variant is more transmissible than the delta variant of Second wave which has the R0 of 1.64.² It is unclear whether this novel version can escape out of the antibody present in a vaccinated or naturally recovered person. According to the existing data, despite many mutations, the novel variation has exhibited almost similar clinical or epidemiological profile.

Understanding the behaviour of the new strain in the vaccinated population will take some time. In India, a huge part of the population has recovered spontaneously and developed a natural antibody, which has been found to be superior to all other antibodies to date. Aside from that, over 120 crore doses of vaccine have been delivered to people, implying that vaccination-acquired antibodies are widespread among Indians. If the virus escapes the vaccine-acquired antibody and produces severe disease, Western countries would have seen a massive wave comparable to the wave of the delta variety because the bulk of the population has the vaccine-acquired antibody.

The question is whether Omicron will infect previously infected and recovered people. If the variant affected the re-infected person, there should have been a large outbreak of illness in Africa. But this has not yet occurred.

Another source of concern is vaccination coverage. Many locations have great vaccine coverage, but some areas have low coverage, making them more vulnerable to the third wave. Data from the Omicron epidemic in South Africa indicate that most of the cases required hospitalisation and oxygen were without vaccination.

In conclusion, based on the facts known regarding the new variation, there is a low possibility that it will cause a third wave as large as the second one in India. In terms of host immunity, India is in a better position. It also appears that the health-care system is in a better position than the second wave. There is a need to accelerate the immunisation campaign in low-coverage areas.

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