

WHO Europe to convene members over new virus variant

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The World Health Organization in Europe said Tuesday it would convene its members to discuss how to handle a new variant of the novel coronavirus discovered in the UK.

Hans Kluge, WHO's regional director for Europe said on Twitter that the organisation was closely monitoring the spread of the new variant and

would "convene member states to discuss strategies for testing, reducing transmission & communicating risks."

A WHO Europe spokeswoman said the meeting would take place Wednesday at 10am (0900 GMT).

"This will be a closed, expert meeting, not a planning meeting, and is an opportunity for UK health authorities to provide an update on the situation and take associated questions," the spokeswoman said.

The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries, including Russia and several Central Asian nations—a region that has registered nearly 24 million COVID-19 cases and over 500,000 deaths.

Kluge said "limiting travel to contain spread is prudent until we have better info," but cautioned that "supply chains for essential goods and essential travel should remain possible."

Over the weekend, WHO Europe urged stronger action to contain the new strain and called on members to "increase the sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 viruses where possible and sharing of sequence data internationally, in particular, to report if the same mutations of concern are found."

Dozens of countries from India to Argentina have banned flights from Britain in fear of the new virus strain, which is reportedly 70 percent more contagious.

According to the WHO there is currently "no evidence to indicate any change in disease severity."

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