

Brazil Covid variant now dominant in Manaus: researcher

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A coronavirus variant from Manaus in northern Brazil, first detected in Japan in January, is now the dominant form of the virus in the hard-hit city, a local researcher told AFP on Wednesday.

The variant's quick spread confirms fears that it is more contagious than the original form of the virus, said Felipe Naveca, who studies coronavirus mutations in northern Amazonas state.

The variant which was first detected early this month in people arriving in Japan from Brazil "is already dominant in Manaus," he said.

Naveca is a researcher with the Leonidas e Maria Deane Institute of Brazil's Fiocruz research foundation.

He said the new variant was present in 51 percent of samples taken from coronavirus patients in December. By January 13, it was 91 percent.

"Moreover, it has spread into the interior of the state" of Amazonas, of which Manaus is the capital.

"We have found it in 11 of 13 towns that we have studied," said Naveca.

Three cases of infection with the new variant were detected Tuesday in the vast South American country's Sao Paulo state—the most populous with 46 million inhabitants.

Brazil has recorded more than 218,000 deaths due to the coronavirus—a toll second only to that of the United States.

"The indications already were that (this variant) is more contagious as it has similar mutations to the ones linked to greater transmissibility observed in the virus variants from Britain and South Africa," said Naveca.

"Now, data on the very [high frequency](#) with which it has been found reinforces the suspicion that it is more contagious."

The British and South African variants have already spread across dozens of countries.

Portugal said Wednesday it was suspending flights to and from Brazil due to the surge in the number of [coronavirus](#) cases and the detection of the new variant. The United States, Britain, Italy and Peru have already barred flights from Brazil.

The World Health Organization said Wednesday that the Brazil variant, called P1, was now in eight countries—up from two just a week ago.

Naveca said the data "does not allow us to say whether this variant is more deadly" than the original, even though the number of infections and deaths in Manaus has exploded in recent weeks.

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