

Delta variant to account for 90% of new EU COVID cases: agency

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The Delta variant, identified for the first time in India, could account for 90 percent of new COVID cases in the European Union in the coming months, the bloc's disease control agency said Wednesday.

"It is very likely that the Delta variant will circulate extensively during

the summer, particularly among younger individuals that are not targeted for vaccination," Andrea Ammon, director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), said in a statement.

"The Delta variant is more transmissible than other circulating variants and we estimate that by the end of August it will represent 90 percent" of new cases in the EU, she added.

The ECDC estimates that the Delta variant (B.1.617.2), is 40 to 60 percent more contagious than the Alpha variant (B.1.1.7), first discovered in the UK, which is currently the predominant variant of the novel coronavirus circulating in the EU.

The agency said that "70 percent of new SARS-CoV-2 infections are projected to be due to this variant in the EU/EEA by early August and 90 percent of infections by the end of August".

To counter the spread of the variant and mitigate the health impact, the ECDC said "it is very important to progress with the vaccine roll-out at a very high pace".

To date, about 30 percent of the over-80s and some 40 percent of the over-60s in the EU are still not fully vaccinated, according to the ECDC.

"At this stage it becomes crucial that the second vaccination dose is administered within the minimum authorised interval from the first dose, to speed up the rate at which vulnerable individuals become protected," Ammon said.

The ECDC is also urging countries to be cautious about relaxing curbs aimed at limiting the spread.

"Any relaxation over the summer months of the stringency of non-

pharmaceutical measures that were in place in the EU/EEA in early June could lead to a fast and significant increase in daily cases in all age groups," the agency said.

This increase could in turn lead to a rise in "hospitalisations, and deaths, potentially reaching the same levels of the autumn of 2020 if no additional measure are taken," it added.

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