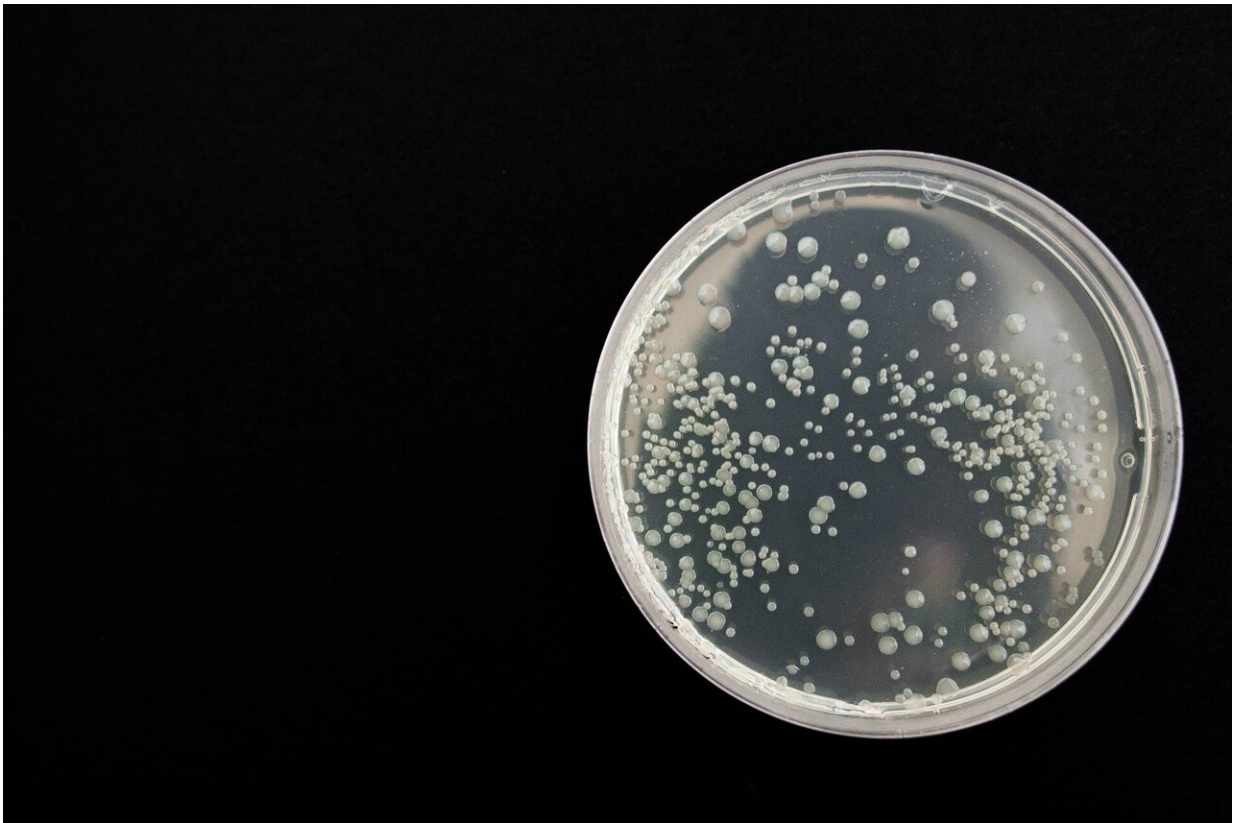


In Oman, fungal infection detected in some COVID-19 patients

June 15 2021, by Isabel Debre



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Oman announced Tuesday that its doctors have detected a potentially fatal fungal infection afflicting some coronavirus patients, the first such known cases on the Arabian Peninsula as the sultanate faces a surge in

COVID-19 infections that has swamped its hospitals.

The country's Health Ministry reported that three COVID-19 patients in Oman have become infected with mucormycosis, a life-threatening condition commonly known as "[black fungus](#)," which has [spread quickly among virus patients in hard-hit India](#). It wasn't immediately clear what condition the three patients were in.

Although the disease remains relatively rare, its sudden increase has stirred fears among doctors and [health officials](#) struggling to combat COVID-19 surges around the world.

Omani doctors warned earlier this week that the sultanate faces an acute shortage of beds amid the proliferation of highly transmissible coronavirus variants, a sputtering vaccine rollout and relaxed movement restrictions. That [medical workers](#) complained about the dire shortfalls on state TV underscored the extent of the health crisis in Oman, where media is tightly controlled. Omani authorities said the infectious delta variant, first detected in India, is coursing through the Gulf Arab state.

Oman's cases have more than tripled in the past month, with authorities recording over 2,000 new cases and 33 deaths on Tuesday. Severe and critical cases have hit record highs in recent weeks and overwhelmed hospitals have been forced to turn away patients. Meanwhile, just 8.5% of Oman's roughly 5 million people have received at least one dose of the vaccine, with skepticism running deep in many provinces.

The fungal condition first prompted global concern as India battled its devastating second wave of the coronavirus. Other countries, including Egypt, have reported scattered cases in recent months as infections spiked. Black fungus existed in India before the virus wave, but the condition stoked fears as it took hold in thousands of people either infected with COVID-19 or recently recovered from the disease.

Mucormycosis is caused by exposure to mucor mold, which is commonly found in soil, air and even in the nose and mucus of humans. It spreads through the respiratory tract and erodes facial structures. Sometimes, doctors have to surgically remove the eye to stop the [infection](#) from reaching the brain.

The fungal infection preys on patients with weakened immune systems and underlying conditions, particularly diabetes. Public health experts also have attributed its spread to the increased use of certain over-the-counter coronavirus medication, like steroids, that impact the response of the immune system. Uncontrolled blood sugar can put immunocompromised people at a higher risk of contracting the disease.

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