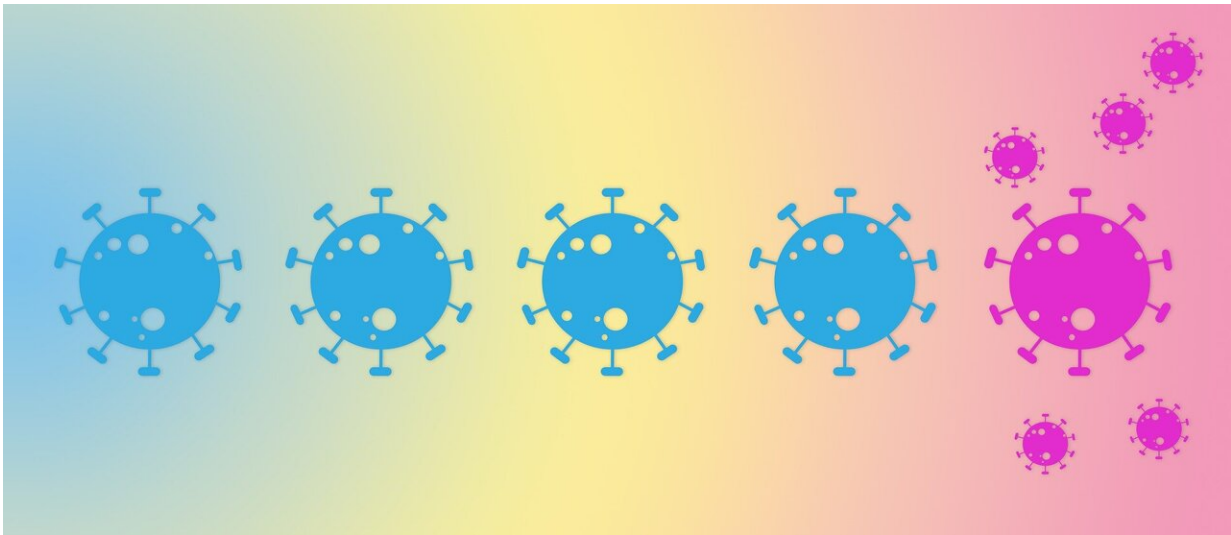


Omicron variant poses 'high to very high' risk to Europe: EU health agency

November 27 2021



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The new COVID variant, dubbed Omicron and originally detected in South Africa, poses a "high to very high" risk to Europe, the EU health agency warned on Friday.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) noted in a threat assessment report that there was still "considerable uncertainty related to the transmissibility, vaccine effectiveness, risk for reinfections and other properties of the Omicron variant."

However, the overall risk that Omicron posed to the European Union and European Economic Area (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) was "high to very high."

Given the possibility that current vaccines may not protect against the variant, and the fact that it may be more transmissible, "we assess the probability of further introduction and community spread in the EU/EEA as high," the Stockholm-based agency said.

"In a situation where the Delta variant is resurgent in the EU/EEA, the impact of the introduction and possible further spread of Omicron could be very high," it added.

Apart from South Africa, Omicron has been detected in Israel in a person coming from Malawi as well as in Botswana, Hong Kong and EU member Belgium.

The agency urged countries to conduct genomic sequencing and contact tracing of confirmed cases, and called for people to not travel to affected areas.

The World Health Organization on Friday declared the recently-discovered strain to be a variant of concern.

The classification puts Omicron into the most-troubling category of COVID-19 variants, along with the globally-dominant Delta, plus its weaker rivals Alpha, Beta and Gamma.

Nations rushed to ban flights to slow the spread of Omicron on Friday, while stock markets and oil prices plunged on fears surrounding the variant, potentially dealing a heavy blow to the global economic recovery.

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