

Cases plateauing in parts of India but omicron still surges

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A health worker in personal protective equipment awaits patients for Covid 19 testing at a health center, in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup

Indian health officials said there were signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the country but cautioned that cases were still surging in other states, linked to a new, stealthier version of the omicron variant.

Most of the cases were concentrated in 10 states, where over 90% of patients had mild symptoms and were being treated at home, Lav Agarwal, a federal [health](#) official, said at a media briefing.

The rate of infection in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi in the north, Maharashtra on the western coast, and West Bengal, Odisha in the east has begun dipping, he said. However, cases are still rising in the southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu along with Gujarat and Rajasthan in the northwest.

"Early indication of a plateau in cases are being reported in certain geographies," Agarwal said Thursday.

He said that the number of people who needed oxygen support or had to be hospitalized during the current surge was lower than in the one fueled by the delta variant last year, which capsized India's public health system.

There are only a few states in India where the delta variant is still circulating. Genetic sequencing indicates that the initial spike in cases in December was powered by an early version of the omicron variant. But most new cases are now linked to a different version [called BA.2](#)—a stealthier version of the omicron, which some scientists worry may also be more transmissible.



An elderly receives Covid-19 vaccination at a makeshift center in a government school in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup

The dip in cases has prompted some local authorities to relax restrictions. In New Delhi, restaurants, bars, and [movie theaters](#) can now run at half capacity.

Health experts cautioned that with restrictions loosening, infections were likely to increase.

"This is a balance that we always have to play with," said Dr. Jacob John, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College in southern Vellore city.

Over half of India's population is fully vaccinated. And around 20% are waiting for a second shot. [India started giving a booster shot](#) to some [vulnerable groups](#) earlier in January, but health officials said that there has been no discussion about whether booster shots were necessary for the wider population.

The country detected over 250,000 new infections on Friday, but Dr. Vineeta Bal, who studies immune systems at the Indian Institute of Science Education Research in Pune city, warned that these were definitely an undercount.



A girl waits in an observation room after receiving Covid-19 vaccination at a makeshift center in a government school in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A health worker administers Covid-19 vaccination to a boy, in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



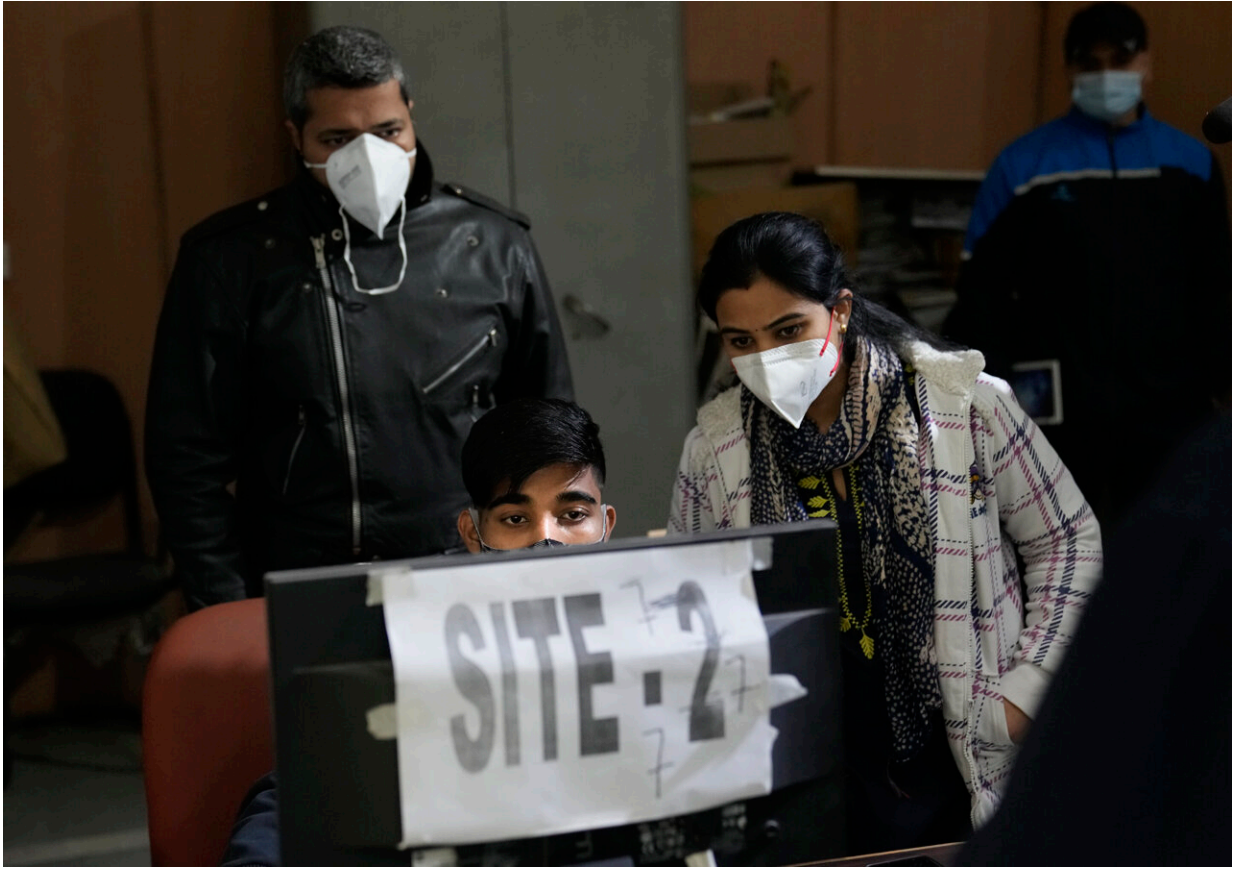
A woman waits for her Covid 19 antigen test result as other waits to get tested at a health center, in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A health worker in personal protective equipment takes a swab test for Covid 19 testing at a health center, in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A health worker administers Covid-19 vaccination to a girl, in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



A health worker registers people for Covid-19 vaccination at makeshift center in a government school in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



People wait in a queue to register for a Covid-19 vaccination at a makeshift center in a government school in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup



An elderly man leaves after getting Covid-19 vaccination at a makeshift center in a government school in New Delhi, India, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Indian health officials said that the first signs of COVID-19 infections plateauing in some parts of the vast country were being seen, but cautioned that cases were still surging in some states. Credit: AP Photo/Manish Swarup

She said that India's pandemic efforts were still being marred by chronic issues like under-reporting of infections and patchy data, but minimizing the number of people who needed to be hospitalized was key.

"And fortunately, so far, even in the good, the bad and the ugly ... it hasn't gone out of hand," she said.

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