

Letter to Editor

Omicron: An Unpredictable New Viral Agent

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Received: 29 December 2021; Accepted: 7 January 2022; Published: 14 January 2022

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LETTER TO EDITOR

The omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 is becoming established in many countries around the world. At the same time, the number of coronaneu infections is increasing, in some cases dramatically. This concerns among other things the USA and numerous European countries. Although the US health authority CDC has revised its estimates of the spread of Omicron significantly downwards - the new variant remains dominant. For the week ending December 25, the agency estimates that about 59 percent of new infections in the U.S. are due to the Omicron variant. For the previous week, the CDC now gives a figure of just under 23 percent; previously, the agency had estimated about 73 percent here. The agency stresses that the numbers could change at a later date when more data are available. Nevertheless, according to the current estimates, the Omicron share has increased significantly in the past four weeks: From 0.6 percent at the beginning of December to now around 59 percent at the end of December. Meanwhile, the number of coronaneu infections is skyrocketing in the United States. Numerous states are seeing record numbers of new infections reported daily. Nationwide, the number of new daily infections is approaching January 2021 peaks. The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 is also on the rise - though it's nowhere near the levels of last winter or this summer's Delta wave. In the U.S., nearly 62 percent of the total population is dually vaccinated, and just under a third of them have received a booster shot. The U.K. yesterday recorded a new high in new infections, with more than 129,000 cases. Authorities reported 129,471 new infections in England and Wales within 24 hours. The number of deaths rose by 18 to a total of 148,021. Figures from Northern Ireland and Scotland were not yet available due to delays in data transmission over the holidays. Scottish authorities reported only a preliminary tally of 9,360 new infections.

In the United Kingdom, where each region is responsible for its own health policy, the highly contagious Omicron variant of the virus is currently spreading rapidly. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have therefore tightened corona measures after Christmas. The government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, which is responsible for England, has so far rejected this. It is relying mainly on two recently published studies showing a lower risk of hospitalization with Omicron than with the previously predominant Delta variant. Italy is also seeing a surge in daily Corona cases. Last night, the Ministry of Health reported more than 78,300 new infections within a day,

well over double the previous day's total. Experts say the omicron variant is also currently spreading rapidly in Italy.

Omicron remains a viral unpredictable agent to date. Further research will show how dangerous Omicron might be.