

Maharashtra-65 samples sent for genome sequencing to ascertain presence of Omicron strain

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- **State health minister said that the state is in the process to increase its genome sequencing capacity by setting up more labs in Nagpur and Aurangabad. Maharashtra has three genome sequencing labs at the moment.**

Maharashtra currently has 10 cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant and an additional 65 samples have been sent for genome sequencing, said state health minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday.

Further, Tope said that the state is in the process to increase its genome sequencing capacity by setting up more labs in Nagpur and Aurangabad. Maharashtra has three genome sequencing labs at the moment.

This has helped in the detection of the 10 Omicron cases, the most recent of which came on Monday when two fully vaccinated persons who returned from abroad last month tested positive.

A man who returned from South Africa and his close contact who came from the US were found infected with the Omicron strain, according to a Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Earlier, a 33-year-old traveller who had returned to Dombivli in adjoining Thane district from South Africa had tested positive for the new variant.

Among the patients in the state also include a non-resident Indian (NRI) woman and her two daughters from Nigeria, who had arrived in the state on 24 November to meet her brother.

The brother and his two minor daughters have also tested positive for the new variant. As per officials, the woman, one of her daughters and her brother were fully vaccinated.

Another case is of a fully vaccinated man from Pune, who returned from Finland in the last week of November. The country has a total of 23 cases of Omicron.

Samples to be submitted to INSACOG

The Union government on Wednesday asked all the states to submit samples of positive cases of international travellers and their contacts to INSACOG.

"The samples of positive cases from international travellers and their contacts as well as from emerging hotspots are promptly submitted to INSACOG labs for genome sequencing as per the protocol," Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said.

Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG) is a laboratory to monitor genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 by a sentinel sequencing effort.