

Covid-19- ICMR to study efficacy of Covishield, Covaxin against Omicron

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NEW DELHI : With India reporting more than 30 cases of Omicron, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has started research to study the efficacy of the widely used Covishield and Covaxin vaccines against the new coronavirus variant.

“The National Institute of Virology (NIV)-ICMR, Pune, has collected blood samples of those infected with Omicron. The scientists are trying to grow the virus in the lab. After we culture the virus in the lab, we will evaluate the efficacy of Covaxin and Covishield against Omicron,” Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR, said at a press meet.

So far, 32 Omicron cases have been reported in five states, according to the health ministry. Nine cases have been detected in Rajasthan, three in Gujarat, 17 in Maharashtra, two in Karnataka and one in Delhi. Omicron cases are less than 0.04% of the total variants detected and those infected with Omicron have showed mild symptoms.

“Currently, 59 countries have reported 2,936 Omicron cases. Over 78,054 probable cases have also been detected; their genome sequencing is ongoing. While overall positivity across the country gives comfort, there are still a large number of districts reporting high case positivity,” said Lav Agarwal, joint secretary in the health ministry.

“Several cases have come to our notice that international travellers coming to India are not providing correct addresses. This is making community surveillance difficult as we are not able to trace them in order to detect Omicron cases and provide help to the infected patients. People will have to help us to let us help them,” he said.

Agarwal said that with increased social mobility and people showing laxity in observing covid-appropriate behaviour, the World Health Organization has highlighted that public health and social measures compliance is falling as vaccination rates increase.

“We need to diligently adhere to these public health measures in order to safeguard ourselves and those around us against covid,” he said.

In the past 24 hours, India has reported more than 9,419 new covid cases. According to health ministry data, the overall covid positivity rate stood at 0.73% last week. Less than 10,000 cases were reported in the past 14 days.

Kerala and Maharashtra have the most active cases with over 43% active cases in Kerala and over 10% in Maharashtra. The health ministry said daily cases were less than 10,000 for 14 consecutive days, with Kerala accounting for 52.8% of total cases in the past week.

Bhargava said the government is monitoring the emerging covid scenario globally. “We need help to not spread panic. District-level curbs should be implemented where positivity is over 5%,” he said.

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So far, more than 1.31 billion covid vaccine doses have been administered in India and more than half of the adult population in the country is now fully vaccinated. More than 7.45 million doses were administered on Thursday, the health ministry said.

Meanwhile, Dr V.K. Paul, NITI Aayog member (health), warned that there has been a massive decline in the usage of face masks across the country and people should get themselves vaccinated with both vaccine doses at the earliest.