India's first case of Omicron's new variant 'XE' detected in Mumbai

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- Of the 230 samples from Mumbai, 228 samples are of Omicron variant, while one was found to be Kappa variant and another XE variant

The first case of XE, a more transmissible COVID-19 variant, was detected in Mumbai on Wednesday, a civic health official said.

A woman who arrived from South Africa in February was found to have this Omicron sub-variant, officials of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said, adding that she was asymptomatic and recovered from the infection.

Besides, a case of the Kappa variant of coronavirus was also detected during a sero survey, a BMC official said, adding the results came in genome sequencing of 376 samples, the 11th batch of testing in the local genome sequencing lab.

Kappa cases have been found in the city earlier too, she added.

As per the sero survey, Omicron was found in 228 out of 230 samples (99.13 per cent) collected from Mumbai. One case was of XE, and another of Kappa.

The genome sequencing of 376 samples was conducted at the municipal Kasturba Hospital's Genome Sequencing Lab.

The condition of the patients found infected with the new strains of the virus was not serious, the official said.

Mumbai on Tuesday reported 56 COVID-19 cases, a three-fold rise from a day earlier, which took the infection count in the country's financial capital to 10,58,185.

The death toll remained unchanged at 19,559 as no new fatality was recorded, while the recovery count rose by 36 to touch 10,38,356, leaving the metropolis with 270 active cases.

A BMC official said the XE variant appears to be 10 per cent more transmissible than the BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron. So far, BA.2 was deemed to be the most contagious of all the COVID-19 variants.

The XE variant is a mutation of the BA.1 and BA.2 Omicron strains, referred to as a "recombinant.

As per the initial studies, the XE variant has a growth rate of 9.8 percent over that of BA.2, also known as the stealth variant because of its ability to evade detection.

The World Health Organization has said the latest mutant may be more transmissible than the previous ones.

Mangala Gomare, executive health officer of the BMC, told PTI that the woman who was found to have contacted the XE variant had arrived from South Africa and tested positive for coronavirus infection three weeks after arriving.

"She was asymptomatic and tested negative the next day," Gomare said.

The woman, who is a costume designer, was a member of a film shooting crew. She arrived from South Africa on February 10, 2022.

"She did not have any travel history prior to that. She had been vaccinated with both doses of the COMIRNATY vaccine," the official said, adding that she suffered from no co-morbidities.

On arrival in India she tested negative for COVID-19, but on March 2, she tested positive during routine testing. In the subsequent test, she tested negative.

She had been quarantined in a hotel rook during this period.

As to whether it was the first case of the XE variant detected in India, BMC officials said they could not confirm this.