

WHO monitors two new Omicron Covid sub-variants BA.4, BA.5: All you need to know

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- UKHSA said last week BA.4 had been found in South Africa, Denmark, Botswana, Scotland and England from 10 January to 30 March.

The world Health Organisation (WHO) has informed that they are now tracking two new sub variants of the highly transmissible Omicron variant- known as BA.4 and BA.5. WHO had earlier added BA.1.1 and BA.3 to their list of tracking as well?

The variant which are globally dominant right now include BA.1 and BA.2.

WHO is tracking these new strains, BA.4 and BA.5, to understand if they are more infectious or dangerous? Only a few dozen cases of BA.4 and BA.5 have been reported to the global GISAIID database, according to WHO.

The UK's Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said last week BA.4 had been found in South Africa, Denmark, Botswana, Scotland and England from 10 January to 30 March.

All the BA.5 cases were in South Africa as of last week, but on Monday Botswana's health ministry said it had identified four cases of BA.4 and BA.5, all among people aged 30 to 50 who were fully vaccinated and experiencing mild symptoms.

WHO said it had begun tracking them because of their "additional mutations that need to be further studied to understand their impact on immune escape potential".

Viruses mutate all the time but only some mutations affect their ability to spread or evade prior immunity from vaccination or infection, or the severity of disease they cause.

For instance, BA.2 now represents nearly 94% of all sequenced cases and is more transmissible than its siblings, but the evidence so far suggests it is no more likely to cause severe disease.