Continue to expect more Covid variants, state researchers

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Recent identification of BA.4 and BA.5 variants supports the main problem indicated by researchers from Nazarbayev University School of Medicine (https://nusom.nu.edu.kz/)(NU SOM): That we should continue to expect more variants in the future.

Dr. Antonio Sarria-Santamera, Associate Professor, and Dr. Paolo Colet, Assistant Professor, both from NU SOM, alongside colleagues from a number of Spanish institutes, conducted a comprehensive review of the recent updates on COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) and intrinsic properties of the SARS-Cov-2 virus.

Understanding the properties of SARS-CoV-2 is essential to comprehend what leads to variants and determine next steps for better management of the pandemic.

Dr. Colet says,

“Intrinsic properties of SARS-CoV-2, including its recombination and genetic basis, and the selective pressure exerted by previous infections, vaccinations, and increasing immunity levels, favour the evolution of the virus, leading to the appearance of new variants.”

Continued emergence of new variants presents a challenge to putting an end to the pandemic. However, from this review, the researchers confirm the most effective strategies to be: 1) the use of masks and social distancing, especially indoors, 2) improved vaccination strategies, and 3) studying the doses and type of vaccines most effective in preventing illness.

Dr. Sarria-Santamera says,

“Globally, we are seeing a new surge in cases related to BA.4 and BA.5 variants. The rise of these new variants seems to stem from their capacity to infect people immune to earlier forms of Omicron and other variants. Lab studies also suggest antibodies triggered by vaccination are less effective at blocking BA.4 and BA.5. Even antibodies from people with hybrid immunity, stemming from vaccination and previous infections, struggle to incapacitate BA.4 and BA.5.”

The researchers acknowledge that we can’t say that BA.4 or BA.5 will be the final variants, as the emergence of additional mutations is highly probable. A possible future scenario is that SARS-CoV-2 will become like other seasonal coronaviruses, peaking in winter and typically reinfecting people every three years.

This review was published in the Journal of Personalized Medicine.

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