



Republic of Botswana

Presidential (COVID-19) Task force
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Media Release

New COVID 19 Variant detected in Botswana

The Presidential COVID-19 Task Force informs the public that four (4) cases of a new COVID-19 variant now known as B.1.1.529, were reported and recorded on Monday 22nd November 2021. The four (4) cases were detected among travellers who tested SARS-COV-2 positive on routine pre travel testing. The variant tests were carried out as part of the routine genomic surveillance of SARS-COV-2 as prescribed in our COVID-19 response plan.

The preliminary report revealed that all the four had been fully vaccinated for COVID-19. As part of the continuing investigations into the virus to establish and contain its local transmissions, contact tracing has revealed close contacts who are currently awaiting their results and the public will be informed regarding the outcome of the exercise.

The initial investigations on the virus have established that the new variant has a high number of mutations as compared to the locally predominant Delta variant. What this means is still unclear and under investigation. New variants have the potential to affect severity of disease, how effective tests pick up the disease as well as potentially vaccine efficacy. At this moment, real world impact of the variant has not been established. Non-pharmaceutical interventions (wearing of masks, social distancing, and avoiding unnecessary travels etc) remain effective and therefore the public is advised to continue observing these.

The Presidential COVID-19 Task Force wishes to further dispel assertions made by some circulating social media reports associating these cases with HIV+ status of the participants. Contrary to these reports, in which one newspaper claims that one case was from an HIV+ participant, is totally false as no HIV status of the clients was associated with these results. These media reports are unfortunate and factually flawed and should be viewed as such. The variant is still being studied and investigated and therefore, it would be premature to conclusively make these types of assertions at this time.

The public is urged to take necessary precautions to protect themselves from COVID-19 as advised from time to time.

Thank you

Dr. K Masupu
Coordinator, Presidential COVID-19 Task Force

