



Media Scanning & Verification Cell



Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

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6509	29.12.2021	29.12.2021	Puducherry	www.thehindu.com/English https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/puducherry/puducherry-reports-first-omicron-variant-cases/article38054467.ece
Title:	Puducherry reports first Omicron cases			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU- , SSU – Puducherry			

Just days ahead of the New Year celebrations, the first Omicron cases were confirmed in the Union Territory of Puducherry on Tuesday, after the new variant was detected in samples of two COVID-19-recovered residents of the city during a genomic sequencing undertaken at the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), Bengaluru.

The patients, a 20-year-old woman, who was in home isolation, and an 80-year-old man, who was admitted to the Tuberculosis and Chest Diseases Hospital, had tested positive for COVID-19 on December 7, but were now almost fully recovered and stable. The Health Department said the sample for genomic sequencing had been sent to INSACOG on December 8, a day after the patients were diagnosed with COVID-19. The samples returned positive for Omicron and the results were provided on Tuesday.

G. Sriramalu, Health Director, said the Department was now in the process of tracing the contacts of the two persons to try and determine the source of the infection and break the transmission chain. The samples of those who test positive

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Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,
Ministry Of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India

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are now being sent for genomic sequencing to determine whether anyone has the Omicron variant, he added.

“We have already instructed the primary health centres in the neighbourhoods of the patients to do targeted contact tracing and sample collection,” said L. Ravi Varman, who heads the Integrated and Disease Surveillance Programme under the National Centre for Disease Control.

The samples were collected from these patients as part of random surveillance testing, and before the Health Department acquired the special RT-PCR kits for targeted testing of the S-gene dropout, a marker for Omicron. The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme has designated two sentinel surveillance sites in the Union Territory — Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education & Research (Jipmer) in Puducherry and the General Hospital in Karaikal.

Apart from priority sampling of COVID-19 cases with a history of travel to countries notified as ‘at-risk’ for Omicron, the Health Department is also taking random samples among the local population.

“We will know over the next few weeks the extent of the circulation of the Omicron variant, which is reported to be even more transmissible than previous strains,” a health official said. The Omicron red flag could not have come at a dicier moment for the Government as it has lined up a series of festive events, from the multi-venue New Year eve concerts expected to attract visitors from neighbouring States, where restrictions are in place, to a World Yoga Festival from January 4 to 7 and the 25 National Youth Festival scheduled from January 12 to 16.

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