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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Thursday, March 10 2022

U.S. condemns ‘barbaric’ attack on Ukraine children’s hospital

LVIV, Ukraine, March 9 (Reuters) - The United States on Wednesday condemned the bombing of a children’s hospital in Ukraine, where officials said a Russian air strike buried patients under rubble despite a ceasefire agreement to allow people out of the besieged city of Mariupol.

The attack, which authorities said injured women in labour and left children in the wreckage, is the latest grim incident of the 14-day invasion, the biggest assault on a European state since 1945.

The destruction took place despite a Russian pledge to halt firing so at least some trapped civilians could escape the city, where hundreds of thousands have been sheltering without water or power for more than a week.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, asked by Reuters for comment, said: “Russian forces do not fire on civilian targets.” Russia calls its incursion a “special operation” to disarm its neighbour and dislodge leaders it calls “neo-Nazis.”

Ukraine’s foreign ministry posted video footage of what it said was the hospital showing holes where windows should have been in a three-storey building. Huge piles of smouldering rubble littered the scene.

“It is horrifying to see the type of the barbaric use of military force to go after innocent civilians in a sovereign country,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

The U.N. Human Rights body said its monitoring mission was verifying the number of casualties.

“The incident adds to our deep concerns about indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas and civilians trapped in active hostilities in numerous areas,” said spokesperson Liz Throssell.

The Donetsk region’s governor said 17 people were wounded in the incident. The city council said the hospital had been hit several times by an air strike, causing “colossal” destruction.

Ukraine accused Russia of breaking the ceasefire around the southern port.

“Indiscriminate shelling continues,” Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba wrote on



Twitter.

Ukraine said 67 children had been killed across the country since the invasion and at least 1,170 civilians had died in Mariupol. It was not possible to verify the figures.

Satellite image company Maxar said images from earlier in the day showed extensive damage to homes, apartment buildings, grocery stores and shopping centres in Mariupol.

Russia’s defence ministry blamed Ukraine for the failure of the evacuation.

A senior U.S. defence official said there were indications Russia’s military was using bombs that were not precision-guided. [read more](#)

Local officials said some civilians had left several Ukrainian cities through safe corridors, including out of Sumy in the east and Enerhodar in the south, but that Russian forces were preventing buses from evacuating civilians from Bucha, a town outside the capital Kyiv.

HUDDLED UNDERGROUND

Diplomatic efforts continued but without much hope.

Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived in Turkey ahead of planned talks on Thursday with Kuleba in what will be the first meeting between the pair since the incursion.

Ukraine wants a ceasefire, liberation of its territories and to resolve all humanitarian issues, Kuleba said, adding: “Frankly...my expectations of the talks are low.”

Moscow wants its demands, including that Kyiv takes a neutral position and drops aspirations of joining the NATO alliance, to be met for it to end its assault.

The U.N.’s nuclear watchdog chief is also flying to Turkey, strongly suggesting he would discuss nuclear safety with Lavrov and Kuleba. [read more](#)

Kyiv and its Western allies say Russia is inventing pretexts to justify an

unprovoked war. Russian President Vladimir Putin has called Ukraine a U.S. colony with a puppet regime and no tradition of independent statehood.

The humanitarian toll, including more than 2 million refugees from Ukraine, and damage to property continued to grow on Wednesday since the invasion began on Feb 24.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said houses had been reduced to rubble all across Ukraine. “Hundreds of thousands of people have no food, no water, no heat, no electricity and no medical care.”

Russian forces hold territory along Ukraine’s northeast border, the east and the southeast. Fighting has taken place in the outskirts of Kyiv, while Ukraine’s second city Kharkiv is under bombardment.

A Russian assault force is stalled north of Kyiv and Western countries say the Kremlin has had to adjust its plan to swiftly topple the government in the face of fierce resistance.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

03/09/2022



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Strive For The Right To Speak In The Mainstream Media

More than fifty Asian community leaders from Houston's international community attended our luncheon to greet the new Houston Chronicle President and Publisher Nancy Meyer and Chairman Jack Sweeney and Chief Revenue Officer Henry Ford. This is also the first time we were able to sit down with the important members of the media in our city.

Chronicle is one of the daily newspapers owned by the Hearst Corporation founded by William Randolph Hearst on March 4, 1887. They own ESPN Hearst Communications, Hearst Magazines, Hearst UK and more. Hearst Magazines is one of the world's largest publishers of many other magazines and media companies across all platforms.

our honored guests how the new immigrants came over here to create an economic miracle in Houston's southwest and International District that has become one of the most successful business model areas of our city.

Publisher Meyer also highly praised the contributions of the Asian American community to our nation. She said that she would strive to strengthen cooperation with the local community. She once held important positions in San Francisco and Miami and has a deep understanding of communities of all ethnic backgrounds.



Many community leaders also expressed their concerns about local crime issues. They want the support of the Houston Chronicle with the publishing of more local news about the difficulties faced by Asian and other international communities.

Today's party coincided with the inauguration and opening of the Houston International Studio and with the

wonderful dance by Roland and Liu Xin's inspiring violin performance.

Southern News Group has gone through 43 winters and summers compared with the Hearst group's more than 133 years. We are still very young, but what we are proud of is that we continue to bring innovation to our media business. The only thing that remains unchanged is our responsibility and mission to society.



The Houston

At the luncheon I told



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



A woman looks at The Empire State Building and the New York Skyline during a preview of SUMMIT One Vanderbilt observation deck, which is spread across the top four floors of the new One Vanderbilt tower in Midtown Manhattan, New York, October 18, 2021. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz



Demonstrators take part in a protest to mark International Women's Day in Mexico City, Mexico March 8, 2022. REUTERS/Raquel Cunha



A worker dries fabrics after applying colour at a dye factory in Narayanganj, Bangladesh, March 9. REUTERS/Mohammad Ponir Hossain



A man carries a dog as people flee, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in Irpin, Ukraine, March 9. REUTERS/Maksim Levin



Inter Milan's Alexis Sanchez fouls Liverpool's Thiago Alcantara during Liverpool v Inter Milan Round of 16 Second Leg Champions League match in Anfield, Liverpool, Britain, March 8. Action Images via Reuters/Carl Recine

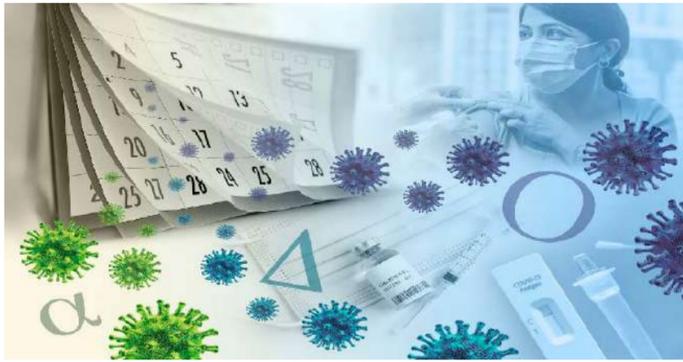


Undergarments hang on a street sign as women attend a protest to mark International Women's Day in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico March 8. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Scientists Now On Alert Over Rising Cases Caused By Omicron 'Cousin' BA.2



Key Points

A new, highly contagious subvariant of Omicron has emerged, which some have begun calling a "stealth variant," but public health officials say it's too soon to tell what kind of real threat, if any, this new strain will present. In the meantime, it's worth watching BA.2, the World Health Organization says. The subvariant has been identified across at least 40 countries, including three cases reported in Houston and several in Washington state. BA.2 accounts for only a small minority of reported cases so far, including 5% in India, 4% of those in the United Kingdom, and 2% each of cases in Sweden and Singapore.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

(Reuters) - The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries. Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant: The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries. Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant: "STEALTH" SUBVARIANT Globally, BA.1 accounted for 98.8% of

sequenced cases submitted to the public virus tracking database GISAID as of Jan. 25. But several countries are reporting recent increases in the subvariant known as BA.2, according to the World Health Organization. In addition to BA.1 and BA.2, the WHO lists two other subvariants under the Omicron umbrella: BA.1.1.529 and BA.3. All are closely related genetically, but each features mutations that could alter how they behave. The variant, B.1.1.529, is believed to have emerged in Botswana - from where there are no direct flights to the U.S. - and is also being found in neighboring South Africa. Hong Kong reported a case after a passenger who had recently traveled from South Africa was found to be infected with the variant, and then infected another person while in the same hotel, quarantining. Israel has also identified a case "in a person who returned from Malawi," with "two more cases of people returning from abroad" placed in quarantine, the country's health ministry said Friday.

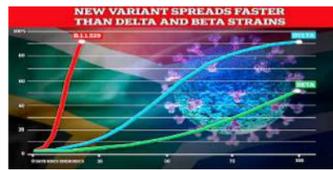
The variant - now named Omicron -- by the World Health Organization has caused an 'exponential' rise in infections in South Africa. Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, said initial data from the variant was worrying and border restrictions should be imposed. 'Looks like vaccine evasion could be real with this variant,' he tweeted, pointing out that the two patients in Hong Kong who had the variant were both double-jabbed with the Pfizer vaccine.



One of the two had recently been in Southern Africa. That person then passed it on to a second person, quarantining in the same hotel. 'It's very airborne,' Feigl-Ding said. 'The hotel guests were in different room across the hallway from each other. Environmental samples found the virus in 25 of 87 swabs across both rooms.' He added: 'I think border and travel restrictions make sense. Especially since Hong Kong only caught the case because of a mandatory hotel quarantine. Which countries in the west still have that??? Almost none.'

Botswana has four confirmed cases, South Africa 77 - with the real figure likely in the hundreds - and Hong Kong has two, meaning 83 cases of the variant are confirmed so far. But South African scientists tried to backpedal today saying it was 'likely' that vaccines still offered 'high levels of protection' against hospitalisations and deaths from the variant. Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands joined Britain, Israel and Singapore in suspending travel from South Africa today and, in a sign of growing alarm, the European Union is also proposing prohibiting travel from the country and its neighbors. As of 5:00 a.m. EST, the CDC website's travel advice page for South Africa had the country listed as 'Level 1: Low Level of COVID-19', with flights to the US permitted from the African country since November 8.

The levels range from Level unknown, Level 1: Low, Level 2: Moderate, Level 3: High and Level 4: Very High.

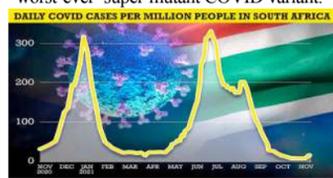


The CDC page asks anyone travelling to and from South Africa to be fully vaccinated, or for those who are not to be tested for Covid. It also recommends travellers follow measures in-place in South Africa, including wearing a mask and social distancing. South Africa's infection rate spiked 93 per cent in a day yesterday amid fears the strain is driving the surge. Local scientists say it has likely spread to all the country's nine provinces, but there is yet to be a surge in hospitalisations in epicentre Johannesburg. Travellers from South Africa have been allowed entry into the US since November 8, when restrictions barring entry to people from more than 30 countries - implemented at the start of the pandemic - were partially lifted. The new rules, which came 19 months after the travel ban was implemented, require international visitors to show both proof of vaccination and a negative Covid test. 'There's a lot we don't understand about this variant,' said Richard Lessells, an infectious disease physician at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, at a press briefing organized by South Africa's health department on Thursday. 'The mutation profile gives us concern, but now we need to do the work to understand the significance of this variant and what it means for the response to the pandemic.'

U.S. stock futures dropped in overnight trading on Thursday as concerns about the variant spread.

Futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 400 points, while those for the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq 100 were both in negative territory.

On Thursday Britain's health secretary, Sajid Javid sounded the alarm over what one senior scientific advisor in the UK termed the 'worst-ever' super-mutant COVID variant.



He said it could make vaccines at least 40 per cent less effective, and as a result he said they had banned flights from South Africa and five other regional countries. Experts explained earlier how the B.1.1.529 variant has more than 30 muta-

tions - the most ever recorded in a variant and twice as many as Delta - that suggest it could be more jab-resistant and transmissible than any version before it. In response, Javid announced that flights from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe will be suspended from midday Friday and all six countries will be added to the red list. South Africa blasted Britain's travel ban as rushed.

Foreign minister Naledi Pandor said: 'Our immediate concern is the damage that this decision will cause to both the tourism industries and businesses of both countries.' A spokesman for the Government said: 'Imposing bans on travellers from countries where a new variant is reported has not yielded a meaningful outcome.'

Israel was the first country to follow suit, also red-listing the six nations, with Singapore, Germany, Italy the Czech Republic and the Netherlands also banning flights from South Africa. A statement from European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU aims to halt air travel from the region due to concerns over the possible dangers posed by the variant.

Germany's new travel restrictions, starting Friday night, will affect South Africa and 'probably neighbouring nations', Spahn said, with only German nationals allowed entry. They must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival even if vaccinated. In Britain they must quarantine for 11 days in Government hotels for about £2,800.



'The last thing we need now is an introduced new variant that causes even more problems,' Spahn said, with Germany in the grip of a ferocious fourth wave of the pandemic.

In Rome, the government on Friday announced it was banning entry to those who have been in South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia or Eswatini in the past fortnight. Health Minister Roberto Speranza said scientists were studying the new B.1.1.529 variant, "and in the meantime, we will follow the path of maximum caution". Asian countries are also preparing to tighten curbs.

(Article continues below)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

(Article continues from above)

Scientists Now On Alert Over Rising Cases Caused By Omicron 'Cousin' BA.2

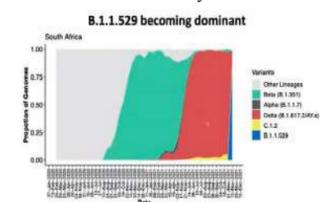
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

No cases have been detected in the UK so far but everyone who has returned from South Africa in the past 10 days will be contacted and asked to take a test. There are currently 13 direct flights a week from South Africa to the United States - Johannesburg and Cape Town are the only cities in the region from where it is possible to fly direct to the U.S. The 13 flights could hold around 3,900 people, if full. United Airlines currently fly direct from Johannesburg to New York City seven days a week, with the 16-hour flight leaving at 10pm and arriving at 7am in Newark. United also fly direct to New York City from Cape Town three times a week, on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. United flies Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners, which can hold 290 people. Delta fly direct from Johannesburg to Atlanta on Saturday, Monday, and Thursday. They use Airbus A350-900, which can seat between 300 and 350 people.



The UK and Israel on Thursday effectively stopped travel from Southern Africa, and some believe the US may follow suit. Flight 'bans' have been implemented before - although they are rarely an outright ban on a commercial flight from a country. Instead, they are stringent restrictions on who can fly, meaning that the airlines themselves cancel the routes because there are so few people who meet the requirements. Donald Trump placed restrictions on travel from China to the U.S. in February 2020, and then the border between the U.S. and Canada was closed, and the U.S. and Mexico. This month Joe Biden ended 18 months of

restrictions placed on arrivals from the European Union, China, Iran, South Africa, Brazil and India, which had largely stopped travel between the countries. Some epidemiologists have argued that putting a travel ban in place for South Africa is counterproductive, because it punishes a country that has been transparent with its data. 'Given how transmissible that the nu variant apparently is, I do not think that halting travel will ultimately be effective in preventing the variant from arriving,' said Jay Bhattacharya, a professor of health policy at Stanford, whose recent research focuses on the epidemiology of COVID-19 as well as an evaluation of policy responses to the epidemic. He told DailyMail.com: 'COVID is a global pandemic. No country can isolate itself forever, and halting travel imposes harm on the kind of international cooperation we will need to end the pandemic. A better idea would be for the international community to provide sufficient vaccine supplies to the affected places.' Others, such as Feigl-Ding, insist travel restrictions are necessary.



South African scientists, meanwhile, add that they are 'concerned by the jump in evolution in this variant'. The variant has over 30 mutations - around twice as many as the Delta variant - which could potentially make it more transmissible and evade the protection given by prior infection or vaccination. 'I've said before - I'm not always as concerned about these variants of concern, but this one, B.1.1.529, does concern me,' said Marc Siegel, professor of medicine at the NYU Langone Medical Center, in an interview with Fox News.

'It's got 32 mutations in the spike protein, which is how the virus spreads. 'And in the province around Johannesburg, there's about 2,500 new cases over the past day, and they think - not proven yet - that this is the predominant variant.'

Siegel said that there were numerous reasons for concern. 'It looks like it's highly contagious,' he said. 'And that is what concerns me, because the other variants that have emerged haven't had a chance against Delta because Delta is so contagious. 'The other issue is, will the vaccine protect against this variant? Will the treatments protect against this variant? We're keeping a really close eye on this one.' The British expert whose modeling helped instigate the first coronavirus lockdown said that the decision to impose travel restrictions was 'prudent'. Professor Neil Ferguson, a member of the British government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said: 'The B.1.1.529 variant has an unprecedented number of mutations in the spike protein gene, the protein which is the target of most vaccines. 'There is therefore a concern that this variant may have a greater potential to escape prior immunity than previous variants.'



A healthcare worker collects a swab from Bronwen Cook for a PCR test against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) before traveling to London, at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa, November 26, 2021.

'It is also concerning that this variant appears to be driving a rapid increase in case numbers in South Africa. The Government's move to restrict travel with South Africa is therefore prudent. 'However, we do not yet have reliable estimates of the extent to which B.1.1.529 might be either more transmissible or more resistant to vaccines, so it is too early to be able to provide an evidence-based assessment of the risk it

poses.' Experts from the UKHSA have been advising ministers on the issue, with a number of scientists expressing serious concern over the variant due to the significant number of mutations in the spike protein.

One senior scientist said: 'One of our major worries is this virus spike protein is so dramatically different to the virus spike that was in the original Wuhan strain, and therefore in our vaccines, that it has a great cause of concern.' Experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) are meeting with South African officials on Friday at 11:00 GMT to assess the evolving situation in the country. The variant could eventually be given the moniker 'Nu' - with the most concerning variants given named after the Greek alphabet. The variant is already in three countries, suggesting it is more widespread than the official tally. Two cases have been detected in Hong Kong - both of whom had links to South Africa - three have been picked up in Botswana and the remainder are in South Africa.

But a lack of surveillance on continental Africa may be underestimating the true numbers there, scientists warned. Professor Tulio de Oliveira, a director of COVID surveillance in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, told a press conference on Thursday that it has been spotted in nearly every corner of South Africa.



A baby cries as her mother receives her Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19, in Diepsloot Township near Johannesburg, South Africa on October 21.

He admitted he was still 'uncertain' about the impact of the variant on the country's epidemic, with other scientists saying that it might be so evolved that it becomes unstable. But Professor Oliveria explained the new variant is 'clearly very different' from previous strains, including the fact that it has five times more mutations on

a specific part of the spike protein than Delta - meaning it might be better at infecting vaccinated people than the world-dominant strain.

He said that officials 'do expect, unfortunately, to start seeing pressure in the healthcare system in the next few days and weeks.'

Joe Phaahlam, South Africa's Health Minister, warned at the same press conference: 'Here is a mutation variant of serious concern.'

He added: 'We were hopeful that we might have a longer break in between waves - possibly that it would hold off to late December or even next year January.'

Current jabs train the immune system to recognize an older version of the spike, and lots of changes to this protein make it harder for the vaccinated people to fight it off.

What Impact Might B.1.1.529 Have On Vaccines?

Scientists have raised concern that the super Botswana Covid variant may be better able to dodge vaccine-induced immunity than all previous strains - including Delta. UK Health Security Agency scientists say it is the 'worst ever'. It combines mutations previously seen on the Beta variant, which sparked concern last year as it was thought to be more vaccine resistant, and those on the more transmissible Alpha strain that was behind the second wave. Scientists warn it is 'plausible' that the mutant variant is spreading quickly because it is better able to infect people who have immunity either from vaccines or previous infection.



In South Africa where it is spreading most people already have immunity from previous infection. Some 40 per cent have also received two doses of the Covid jab. But despite the concern lab tests are yet to confirm that the variant is better able to dodge vaccine-triggered immunity than other mutant strains. Very little is known about its virulence and whether someone who catches the mutant strain is more likely to end up in hospital or dying from the disease. (Courtesy https://www.dailymail.co.uk/)