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Southern DAILY

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Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Tuesday, July 07 2022|

Boris Johnson says he won't quit as clamour grows

LONDON, July 6 (Reuters) - Britain's Boris Johnson defied pressure from senior ministers and a mounting rebellion within his party to quit on Wednesday, vowing to stay on as prime minister and fight off any attempts to oust him.

After more than 30 resignations from within the government and with many lawmakers in his Conservative Party in open revolt, some cabinet ministers went to Downing Street to tell Johnson he needed to go, a source said.

One encouraged him to make a dignified exit by setting his own timetable rather than face a confidence vote.

But despite the clamour for him to resign, Johnson was continuing to focus on the important issues, a government source said after his meeting with members of his top cabinet team. A senior Conservative said the prime minister was digging in.

"I am not going to step down and the last thing this country needs, frankly, is an election," he told a parliamentary committee earlier, saying he had a mandate from the 2019 national election, which he won with a large majority.

Johnson also refused to say if he would try to stay in the job even if he lost a confidence vote from his own lawmakers. That could come next week if they agree to change the party's rules, which only allow one such challenge a year. He narrowly won a similar vote last month.

"The prime minister is deluded if he feels he can cling on in the face of collapsed parliamentary support," said a senior Conservative lawmaker on condition of anonymity. "He is embarrassing the Conservative Party and showing contempt for the electorate."

But culture minister Nadine Dorries said she was behind Johnson and, when asked if others also still backed him, she replied: "Yes, definitely."

The dramatic resignations on Tuesday of his health and finance ministers triggered a growing swell of other ministerial departures, while many Conservative lawmakers openly said they wanted him gone, questioning his fitness to govern and his integrity.

At parliamentary questions on Wednesday some Conservatives struggled not to laugh when others poked fun at him and he took a pummeling from a committee of senior politicians over his past behaviour, his motivation and some of the scandals that have come to define much of his tenure.

'TRUMPIAN STANDOFF'?
The ebullient Johnson came to power nearly three



years ago, promising to deliver Britain's exit from the European Union and rescue it from the bitter wrangling that followed the 2016 Brexit referendum.

Since then, some Conservatives have enthusiastically backed the former journalist and London mayor while others, despite reservations, supported him because he was able to appeal to parts of the electorate that usually rejected their party.

That was borne out in the December 2019 election. But his administration's combative and often chaotic approach to governing and a series of scandals have exhausted the goodwill of many of his lawmakers while opinion polls show he is no longer popular with the public at large.

Despite even one-time supporters saying the current crisis could only end with his resignation, Johnson vowed to fight on and his spokesperson said he was confident of winning another confidence motion.

"The job of a prime minister in difficult circumstances when you've been handed a colossal mandate is to keep going," Johnson told parliament. "And that's what I'm going to do."

All might change next week when the 1922 Committee that sets the rules for the Conservative parliamentary party holds an election to its executive

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks during the weekly question time debate, in Parliament in London, Britain, July 6, 2022 in this screen grab taken from video. Reuters TV via REUTERS

that could usher in a rule change to allow a second confidence vote on his leadership. read more

Johnson has tried to reassert his authority by quickly appointing Nadhim Zahawi - a rising Conservative star widely praised for the successful rollout of COVID-19 vaccines - as finance minister. But Zahawi was among the group of ministers in Downing Street who were to tell him to go.

Earlier in parliament, senior ministers struggled to contain their laughter as the opposition Labour leader poked fun at his cabinet for being in the "charge of the lightweight brigade".

"At some point, we have to conclude that enough is enough. I believe that point is now," said Sajid Javid, in his resignation speech as health minister, with Johnson listening stony-faced.

His leadership has been mired in scandals over the last few months. He was fined by police for breaking COVID-19 lockdown laws, while a damning report laid bare breaches of those rules by Downing Street officials, and a committee is investigating whether he then lied to parliament about it.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

07/05/2022

Future Of The Bullet Train Between Houston And Dallas

Just last week, a divided Texas Supreme Court gave the Texas Bullet Train the power to seize private property if needed to establish the 240-mile passenger rail corridor between Dallas and Houston. It is the nation's first bullet train and the ruling comes amid financial uncertainty for the \$30 billion dollar project.

With the company now having eminent domain authority, the investment will emerge to get the project back on the track.

Some of the property owners were dismayed and disappointed that their land will be forced to be sold in the future.

If this train can be built, it would travel at a speed of up to 200 miles per hour and



enable passengers to commute between Dallas and Houston in about 90 minutes.

We are fully in favor of supporting the bullet train. The project will bring economic prosperity to the region

and will play a vital role in the most important infrastructure in the United States.

Our national infrastructure has been out of date for many decades. We urge President Biden to help

Texas build the bullet train to set an example as the first and major infrastructure project for our nation.



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Editor's Choice



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson walks at Downing Street, in London. REUTERS/John Sibley



A reveler takes part in an opening of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, Spain. REUTERS/Juan Medina



Onlookers stand at the edge of floodwaters on a residential street following heavy rains in the Windsor suburb of Sydney, Australia. REUTERS/Loren Elliott



People gather near empty coffins ahead of a mass funeral for victims of an east coast tavern where bodies of youth were found which prompted nationwide grief, in the Eastern Cape province, in East London, South Africa. REUTERS/Siphiwe Sibeko



Firefighter tries to cool himself off after extinguishing a fire at a market after shelling, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in Sloviansk, Donetsk region, Ukraine. REUTERS/Marko Djurica



A bolt strikes near Moscow State University building during a thunderstorm in Moscow, Russia. REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov

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COVID Immunity Levels
Can Be Measured In 15 minutes

Houston Startup Develops Ground
Breaking COVID Immunity Test

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



A team of researchers at Brevitest has developed a quick, finger-stick blood test to determine immunity to COVID-19, using a small, desktop device they invented that conducts the test using robotic technology with proprietary testing cards used to analyze the blood samples. Photographed at their offices, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Houston. (Photo/Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

A Houston startup has developed a revolutionary COVID-19 test that can measure immunity levels and determine whether or when people need a new vaccine or booster to protect themselves from the disease.

The instant test could be widely available soon, if the Food and Drug Administration grants the new device fast-track approval. Knowing personal immunity levels could become increasingly important in the face of new variants, like omicron, when people need to decide whether or when they need a new vaccine or booster shot.

The affordable, first-of-its-kind fingerstick blood test is offered by Brevitest, a company developed at Fannin Innovation Studios, a life sciences incubator in River Oaks. Researchers invented a new method for measuring antibodies, using cloud computing to process results and delivering them in 15 minutes to determine if an immune system needs a boost.

Doctors, companies and public health officials can use the tests to determine the COVID immunity levels for individuals, workforces or entire communities so they can employ more targeted strategies for slowing the disease. Since the technology is protected by patents, Brevitest can license the unique device and potentially become one of the most significant startups to emerge from Houston's life sciences community in a decade.



Leo Linbeck III, the CEO and co-founder of Brevitest, said his company's technology builds on recent

research that has determined how many antibodies per unit of blood people need to fight off or minimize a coronavirus infection. The new test lets people know where they stand, whether from a vaccination or natural immunity to determine if they need a booster or difference vaccine Brevitest can adapt the test to detect antibodies for any variant, including omicron. Once approved, the company could begin deploying the device across the country within a few months to carry out millions of tests a week.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — worried about vaccines wearing off — recently authorized COVID-19 booster shots six months after vaccination, prioritizing those over 65 years old. But individual needs vary widely and some people lose antibodies quicker than others.

"Everyone's biology is different, and the data seems to indicate that it could be anywhere from three months to 12 months when you see the antibody level begin to wane," Linbeck told me. "That's particularly problematic for older people who tend to have less of an immune response or those who are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised."



Fast tests to detect SARS-CoV-2 antibodies have been on the market since early in the pandemic, but they only offer positive or negative results and don't measure antibodies.

Doctors who have patients with weak immune systems have relied on a precise blood test called an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, or ELISA, that are currently done at central laboratories. But those results can take several days to return.

"We're trying to build a point-of-care ELISA because the way we look at it, either you can have accuracy that will take time or you can have speed, and then you lose accuracy," ex-

BUSINESS

plained Dr. Dev Chatterjee, a co-founder and co-inventor. "The question we asked ourselves is, is there a way we can marry the two?"

The Brevitest device allows a technician to place a small blood sample on a custom-designed cartridge, which is inserted into a shoebox-sized device that produces digital diagnostic data, the same as the precision test.

The device sends the data to the cloud, where it is processed using proprietary software Linbeck wrote. Patients receive an alert and can access the results with their phones, which also allows them to compare their result with the latest COVID immunity data.

The new company can make a profit at the same \$43 reimbursement rate insurance companies pay for a central lab test, Linbeck said. Brevitest is offering tests at its lab in Houston.



Until recently, researchers were unsure how many antibodies someone needed to fend off the virus. But that changed in September when the journal Nature Medicine published a new study that used the World Health Organization standard to measure antibody levels and showed a correlation between antibody levels and infection rates.

Healthy people can use the test to determine if they need a booster or should wait a few months to take full advantage of their vaccine or illness-induced antibodies.

"There's some evidence that if you wait longer and you let your antibody count drop, when you get that vaccine (booster), you get a bigger bump. You get more antibody production than you would if you had taken it while you still have active antibody response," he added.

Linbeck, Chatterjee and co-inventor Dr. Atul Varadhachary founded Brevitest in 2013 to create an office-based blood testing system that would generate precision blood test results quicker. The National Institutes of Health provided a grant during the test's early development, and the Centers for Disease Control asked Brevitest to develop an Ebola test during the 2014 outbreak.



Aquinas Companies CEO Leo Linbeck works on code for a Brevitest analyzer, Brevitest is one of the startup companies helped by Fannin Innovation Studio which helps researchers and scientists with life science product develop-

ment July 7, 2016, in Houston.

(Photo/James Nielsen / Houston Chronicle) Chatterjee and Varadhachary said the scientific challenge was far more formidable than expected. Designing a new cartridge that prepared the blood for scanning in a new way took years. Linbeck, an engineer, worked on reliability and durability to meet exacting medical standards. "Once you actually get down to developing for the real world versus creating something for the lab, there is a whole ocean of problems that you have to solve," Chatterjee explained. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the company refocused on measuring SARS-CoV-2 antibodies.

Brevitest is one of four life science start-ups spun out of Fannin Innovation Studio, Linbeck's biotechnology development company. He is best known as the executive chairman of the Linbeck Group, a construction company founded by his grandfather that built many of the structures at the Texas Medical Center. Linbeck and Varadhachary started Fannin to commercialize discoveries made at TMC. But Brevitest was Fannin's homegrown effort to address the lengthy delay in returning accurate blood test results, a goal of many companies.



A team at Brevitest has developed a quick, finger-stick blood test to determine a person's immunity to Covid-19 using a small, desktop device they invented that conducts the test using robotic technology with proprietary testing cards used to analyze the blood samples. Photographed at their offices, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Houston. (Photo/Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

The most famous attempt to develop a rapid diagnostic device is TheraNas, a Silicon Valley-based company that promised a full blood workup from a tiny vial using a handheld device. Linbeck, Chatterjee and Varadhachary say TheraNas's claims never made any sense to them, and the company's founder, Elizabeth Holmes, is in federal court this week fighting federal fraud charges. In contrast to TheraNas, Brevitest only claims to conduct one test per fingerstick and will release its testing data for outside review, Chatterjee said.

Brevitest will never replace the broad tests best done by a central lab, for things like annual physicals, because they require a large amount

of blood and the big machines are more efficient, Linbeck said. But the team foresees doctors and clinics using Brevitest to routinely monitor patients with compromised immune systems or to track specific biomarkers for cancer and other infectious diseases. Most breakthrough research in health care and medical devices never makes it out of the lab because investors lack the patience required to bring a product to market.



Leo Linbeck III, left, founder and chairman of Fannin Innovation Studio and managing partner Atul Varadhachary, right, develop medical technologies along with their portfolio companies like Procyron. Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014, in Houston. (Photo/Marie D. De Jesus, Staff / Houston Chronicle)

The company's strategy of licensing bio-medical discoveries and gathering researchers under the studio's umbrella to keep administrative overhead low until they had a commercial product. Linbeck said the investor community needs to have more conversations about the best way to finance life science startups.

"There's a lot of misconceptions about the way that this stuff works," he said. "Having been down in the weeds, I have a greater level of humility and respect around just how difficult this is. The human body doesn't like to be tinkered with, which is great news for us from an evolutionary standpoint, but it's not so great from a medical innovation development standpoint." From an investor perspective, Linbeck said the most significant challenge was finding the right people to manage the transition from the research lab to a for-profit company. Fannin recruits and trains people with medical and life science skills who are interested in entrepreneurship.

"This is about making a big pile of money because that's also what will sustain us over the long haul," Linbeck said. "That means that we get involved early, and it takes longer, but when the payoff happens, I think it'll be really-big multiples."

Energy projects and technology investments can pay off big, too, and take less time. But Linbeck said he doesn't mind the wait to build a business that saves lives.

"Anything really important and high impact takes a decade," he said. "It just does." (Courtesy houstonchronicle.com)

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COMMUNITY

BA.2 Omicron Variant:
What We Know About The
'Stealth' COVID Variant

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



A medical syringe and a model of coronavirus are seen with 'omicron' sign and World Health Organization logo displayed in the background in this illustration photo taken in Krakow, Poland on November 29, 2021. (Photo by Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto via Getty Images). NurPhoto via Getty Images

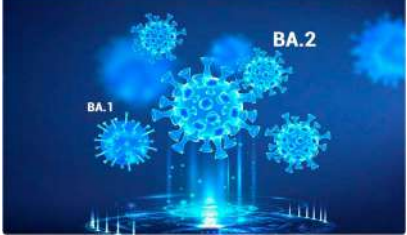
BA.2, the subvariant of the omicron variant of COVID-19, continues to spread around the world. Preliminary research shows that while it may be more transmissible than omicron, it does not cause more severe illness.

Research on the variant — now reported in more than half of the U.S. states — continues. Here's what we know so far

What is BA.2?
Viruses mutate into new variants as a "protection," allowing them to remain in circulation. The viruses break off into variants and sub-variants that have similar characteristics but with slight biological changes. The omicron variant is an umbrella term that encompasses four sub-variants: BA.1, BA.2, BA.3 and B.1.1.529. BA.2 is thought to have an additional 20 mutations on its spike protein compared to the original omicron variant.

Where is BA.2 spreading?
BA.1 is the dominant omicron sub-variant in circulation around the world but BA.2 is spreading quickly in some places. The BA.2 subvariant has been detected in at least 55 countries and more than 25 U.S. states, according to Outbreak.info, a Scripps Research data project. European countries, especially Denmark, are the countries most impacted by the sub-variant. In Denmark, one of the first places to identify BA.2's spread, more than 50,000 new infections were reported in one day last week in a country of 5.8 million people. It has also been increasing in India, Qatar, Nepal and the Philippines. BA.2 is currently circulating at low levels in the U.S.,

officials said.



What is a "stealth" variant?

BA.2 has been dubbed a "stealth" variant due to its makeup that could make it harder to detect through certain kinds of COVID tests. The World Health Organization has not classified it as a "variant of concern," but is continuing to monitor its spread.

Is BA.2 more transmissible?

Early research indicates BA.2 may be more transmissible than BA.1, the original omicron strain.

Is BA.2 more severe?

It doesn't appear that BA.2 causes more severe illness than BA.1. In general, omicron does not cause the same severe level of illness as other COVID-19 strains.

Do vaccinations protect against BA.2?

Research seems to indicate existing vaccines offer about the same level of protection from BA.2 as they do against BA.1.

According to CNBC, a booster dose was 70% effective at preventing symptomatic illness from BA.2 two weeks after receiving the shot, compared with 63% effectiveness of the original omicron strain. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky confirmed this during a recent White House briefing.



A doctor loads a dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine into a syringe, Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021, at a mobile vaccination clinic in Worcester, Mass. AP

"In terms of early studies, we have not seen any studies that suggest it's more severe, nor

have we seen studies that suggest that it will evade our vaccines any more so than omicron has already -- and, in fact, that our vaccines will work just like it has with omicron," Walensky said.

Related

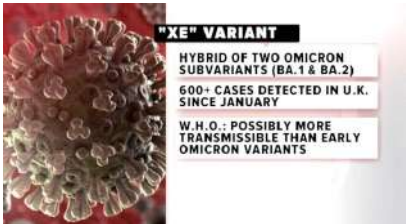
XE COVID Variant: This new highly transmissible variant is a combination of BA.1 and BA.2 strains and may also be more contagious than the BA.2 subvariant, WHO Says.

Even as the omicron subvariant BA.2 becomes the dominant COVID strain in the U.S., health officials are warning of the next variant that could possibly be even more contagious.

The variant, XE, is comprised of genetic material from two other strains — BA.1, the original omicron strain, and BA.2, or "stealth" omicron, a name given for its ability to evade certain types of tests, NBC Chicago reported. It's referred to as a "recombinant strain," meaning it is made up of two previously distinct variant.

Preliminary reports from the World Health Organization indicate XE is 10% more transmissible than BA.2, though those findings are still being investigated.

The variant was first detected in the United Kingdom in mid-January. Since then, some 600 cases of XE have been reported.



The WHO said it is monitoring the variant and will offer updates as more data becomes available.

BA.2 is now being blamed for more than half of all COVID infections in the U.S. The hardest-hit area is the Northeast where it is blamed for more than 70% of all cases.

The more contagious omicron subvariant BA.2 has become the dominant COVID-19 strain in the U.S., but international health experts are putting an increased focus on a new hybrid variant that may even be more infectious.

The XE variant is a recombinant, meaning it is comprised of genetic material from two other strains, which in this case are BA.1, the original strain of omicron, and BA.2, known as "stealth omicron."

According to an epidemiological update published March 29 by the World Health Organization, estimates show XE is 10% more transmissible than BA.2, however the findings require further confirmation.



The variant was first detected in the United Kingdom in mid-January, and since then, 600 cases have been reported in the country. The United Kingdom's Health Security Agency has said it is monitoring XE along with two other recombinants, XD and XF, which are made up of the Delta and BA.1 strains.

U.K. health authorities explained in late March there was "insufficient evidence to draw conclusions about growth advantage or other properties of this variant," but addressed initial reports about its infectiousness.

"This particular recombinant, XE, has shown a variable growth rate and we cannot yet confirm whether it has a true growth advantage," said Susan Hopkins, chief medical advisor for UKHSA.

Recombinant variants themselves, however, are not out of the ordinary, according to health officials.

"Recombinant variants are not an unusual occurrence, particularly when there are several variants in circulation, and several have been identified over the course of the pandemic to date," Hopkins stated. "As with other kinds of variant, most will die off relatively quickly."



WHO said it "will continue to closely monitor and assess the public health risk associated with recombinant variants" and will "provide updates as further evidence becomes available." (Courtesy <https://www.nbccchicago.com/> and <https://www.al.com/news>)

Related
Top FDA Official Says Fully Vaccinated Americans May Need More Covid Shots In Fall



Nathan Jacobs, of Boston gets his Covid Booster shot from Sassy Yagoutian at City Hall on December 9, 2021 in Boston, MA. (Photo/ Stuart Cahill | MediaNews Group | Getty Images)

Key Points

Dr. Peter Marks with the Food and Drug Administration said people might need another booster shot in the fall.

Marks also said the U.S. might need to switch to a different vaccine that targets specific variants of Covid.

The FDA on Tuesday approved a fourth dose for people age 50 and older and fifth dose for certain younger individuals with compromised immune systems.

People in the U.S. might need another Covid booster shot this fall as public health experts expect immunity from the vaccines to wane and transmission of the virus to increase during colder months, the Food and Drug Administration's top vaccine official said Tuesday.

Dr. Peter Marks, head of the FDA office responsible for vaccine safety, indicated the U.S. might need to offer fourth shots for people under 50-years-old in the fall. People who are now eligible for fourth shots would likely get a fifth shot if there's evidence that would be beneficial, Marks told reporters on a conference call.

Marks also said the U.S. could switch to a different vaccine that targets a specific Covid variant or a mix of several. The current vaccines were developed against the original virus that emerged in Wuhan, China in late 2019, and their effectiveness has declined over time as the virus mutates.



Pfizer and Moderna are conducting clinical trials on shots that target both omicron and other circulating variants. The FDA will hold an advisory committee meeting on April 6 to discuss the future of booster shots in the U.S. and whether the vaccines need an update to offer better protection against variants.

"It would not be surprising if there is a potential need for people to get an additional booster in the fall along with a more general booster campaign if that takes place," Marks said. "It may be that a decision is made that rather than the vaccines we currently have, which are called vaccines against the prototype virus, that we will move to a vaccine that is either against one of the variants or something else." (Courtesy <https://www.nbccchicago.com/>)