



Round Table Report

21 December 2020

For restricted use

This report summarizes the ECDC daily roundtable discussion and provides update on threats detected and monitored by Epidemic Intelligence.

Active threat

COVID-19 associated with SARS-CoV-2 – multi-country (world) – 2020

The next update on worldwide COVID-19 figures will be on 23 December 2020.

Other updates:

On 18 December 2020, the [US Food and Drug Administration](#) issued an emergency use authorization for the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for use in individuals 18 years of age and older.

Rapid increase of a SARS-CoV-2 variant with multiple spike protein mutations observed in the United Kingdom

Summary: Over the last few weeks, the United Kingdom (UK) has faced a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases in South East England, leading to enhanced epidemiological and virological investigations. Analysis of viral genome sequence data identified a large proportion of cases belonged to a new single phylogenetic cluster. The new variant is defined by multiple spike protein mutations (deletion 69-70, deletion 144, N501Y, A570D, D614G, P681H, T716I, S982A, D1118H) present as well as mutations in other genomic regions. While it is known and expected that viruses constantly change through mutation leading to the emergence of new variants, preliminary analysis in the UK suggests that this variant is significantly more transmissible than previously circulating variants, with an estimated potential to increase the reproductive number (R) by 0.4 or greater with an estimated increased transmissibility of up to 70%. This new variant has emerged at a time of the year when there has traditionally been increased family and social mixing. There is no indication at this point of increased infection severity associated with the new variant.

A few cases with the new variant have to date been reported by Denmark, the Netherlands, Iceland, Italy, and, according to media reports, Belgium.

ECDC assessment: Any increased transmissibility would increase the likelihood of spread, particularly if increased family and social mixing that is traditional at this time of the year is not reduced, and further spread outside the UK, especially if non-essential travel is not reduced or avoided altogether, could eventually lead to the variant replacing currently circulating variants in much of the EU/EEA.

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Mutations affect the S-gene target used in RT-PCR assays in use for diagnostic purposes. Countries need to assess the impact and adapt the gene target regions for SARS-CoV-2 PCR diagnostics if necessary. If sequencing capacity is limited, multi-target RT-PCR assays that include a S-gene target that is affected by the deletions present in the variant can be used for identifying isolates that show a S-gene drop out as signal for further investigation. Confirmation using sequencing is recommended.

No data are available on the potential impacts of this new variant on health outcomes or vaccine effectiveness.

Given that there is currently a lack of evidence to indicate that the new virus variant is widely spread and the occurrence is limited to a few countries or local areas, timely efforts to prevent and control the spread of the variant should mirror those effective in an early epidemic phase, including avoidance of non-essential travel to and from the affected areas as well as increased testing efforts, contact tracing and isolation of confirmed cases with epidemiological link to affected areas. Efforts to carry out sequencing of cases in a timely manner, including cases who have recently been to or are in contact with people from affected areas, is important to understand the spread of the variant.

ECDC actions: ECDC published a [Threat Assessment Brief](#) on 20 December 2020. ECDC will, in collaboration with the EU/EEA Member States, continue to monitor and report on new affected areas.

Risk assessment under production

A Threat Assessment Brief "Rapid increase of a SARS-CoV-2 variant with multiple spike protein mutations in the United Kingdom" has been published on 20 December.

Joint ECDC and EFSA rapid outbreak assessment to be produced on Salmonella Enteritidis contamination in poultry products from Poland to be published in week 03-2021.

Expert deployment

One EPIET fellow is deployed to DRC until 21 December 2020 to support response activities related to the Ebola outbreak.

The Round Table Report contains information that could be considered sensitive or is still under verification. Its distribution is restricted to intended users only.

Participants

Senior Management: -

EI and Response Head of Section: -

Duty Officers:

24/7: -

Threat Detection: -

Rapid Assessment and Outbreaks: -

Communication: -

Representative of:

Epidemic Intelligence: -

Response: -

Vaccine Preventable Diseases: -

Emerging and Vector-borne Diseases: -

Food and Water-borne Diseases: -

Influenza: -

Microbiology Coordination: -