

COVID-19 Situation

Variants & Concerns

Written by: Hadizah Tijani (Health Sector Advisor)

A year after the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Corona Virus) plunged the world into a pandemic, global communities are yet to recover from its devastating effects. This virus doesn't appear to be ceasing at any rate as infections continue to increase globally, barely leaving room for health care systems to recover from its previous effects. Scientists are working tirelessly to study/understand the virus and develop an effective cure as it evolves into new variants.

As with all viruses, the novel Coronavirus has undergone several changes (Mutations) over time, spawning variants of the virus. Since the pandemic outbreak, eleven variants of the virus have been discovered, with four of them (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta) categorized as variants of global concern. Scientists have actively tracked these changes to understand the virulence of each new variant and the efficacy of the different vaccines against them.

The fastest spreading of the four variants of global concern has been the Delta variant, which is more transmissible than the other

three. Some studies are attributing Delta's high transmissibility to its ability to evade the body's immune response.

Using the influenza virus as a case study, scientists have studied that over time an accumulation of genetic mutation by the virus causes it to undergo a change called Antigenic drift- this means that the surface of the mutated virus becomes different from the original virus. The implication is that vaccines and immunity against the old strains of the virus no longer work against the new strains.

This phenomenon is one of the main reasons the flu vaccine is reviewed and updated each year to keep up with the influenza virus as it changes. Although scientists have revealed that the Coronavirus mutates but hasn't undergone an antigenic drift yet, given the similarities between the Coronavirus and the influenza virus, there is reason to remain vigilant for the possibility of an antigenic drift occurring and prepare to alter the current vaccines accordingly.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is reported to have an efficacy of 88% in preventing symptoms of the disease caused by the Delta variant in fully vaccinated people. The AstraZeneca vaccine provides slightly less protection, with Two shots being 60% effective against the variant. However, the effectiveness of one dose of either vaccine was much lower (33%). The Delta variant continues to thrive despite vaccination efforts. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Delta variant has spiked Covid-19 deaths globally by 80% in the last month. Global communities are racing to vaccinate their population to achieve herd immunity against the virus and prevent hospitalization and death from the Delta variant

In Africa, only around 1.5 percent of its population of more than one billion people have been fully vaccinated. Much of the continent relies on donations from the global vaccine sharing scheme COVAX and from China, India, and the US. The situation in many African countries is becoming dire as the weekly spike in cases has led to increased hospital admissions and a shortage of oxygen and intensive care beds. This is likely to worsen if the virus becomes resistant to the current vaccines and developed nations prioritize their people.

This scenario is becoming evident in Africa's slow vaccination rate largely hinged on global vaccine inequality as wealthier countries stockpile Covid shots. African nations cannot continue to rely on foreign aids and donations to respond to the growing crises. As it stands, health care systems worldwide are overwhelmed and strained as infections continue to surge rapidly, especially those caused by the Delta variant. The Coronavirus would continue to mutate, and the hope is that one of these random mutations do not lead to a lethal variant that might render the current vaccines ineffective and reverse the hard-won gains that have been made.



ADVISORY | GOVERNMENT RELATIONS | REGULATORY AFFAIRS | INVESTMENT
FACILITATION | POLICY ADVOCACY

ACIOE Associates is an advisory services firm providing solutions in Strategy, Government Relations, Regulatory Affairs, Economic Development, Advocacy, Investment Facilitation, and Policy Analysis.

Our team provides advisory services on critical sectors, including Health, Agriculture, Social Impact, and Government relations.

We have supported governments (Federal and Subnational), development partners, and organizations around sustainable solutions to the challenging economic, political, and development issues within the countries we operate.