

## Vice President briefed about new COVID-19 strains found in UK and South Africa

### CCMB Director informs Vice President that new strains are less likely to change efficacy of vaccines

### No evidence of worse outcomes for patients although strains are more infective

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The Director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Dr. Rakesh Mishra today met the Vice President of India, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu in Hyderabad and briefed him about the new strains of SARS-Cov-2 found in the United Kingdom and South Africa recently.

Shri Mishra apprised the Vice President that the mutations in the new strains are less likely to change the efficacy of the vaccines under development. Besides, there is no evidence that suggests the strains are associated with worse outcomes for the patients, although they are more infective. The same disease management strategies are expected to work for the variants too.

The Vice President sought to know about the likely impact of the new strains in India and the work being carried out on various aspects of the novel corona virus at CCMB. Dr. K. Lakshmi Rao, senior principal scientist at CCMB was also present.

Dr. Mishra informed the Vice President that investigations were underway to find out whether the new strains are present in India.

Making a presentation to the Vice President on the work being done at the CCMB on SARS-CoV-2, he said that the new strain was 71% more infectious than the other strains. A parallel strain identified in South Africa suggests that it affects younger people more, though more thorough research is required, he explained.

He explained that the analysis of the genomes sequenced by CCMB and other researchers in the country has revealed that the initial spread of the virus in India was mainly due to novel India specific clade, named I/A3i clade. The I/A3i clade had likely entered India from other Southeast Asian countries. The analysis by CCMB had further revealed that, with time, the weaker A3i clade was eventually replaced by the A2a clade, which is also the globally prevalent strain.

He said CCMB was the first non-ICMR lab to start testing samples for the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. It also established SoPs for other research institutes and universities for testing. It has trained more than 200 personnel from medical hospitals and other testing centres on the testing protocols. CCMB itself has tested more than 50,000 samples so far by RT-PCR method. Together, all CSIR labs have tested more than 7,00,000 samples thus far.

Dr. Mishra also said that CCMB's dry swab Direct RT-PCR method has been approved by ICMR. With partners like Apollo Hospitals, the kits will be manufactured in large numbers and they will

reach masses through Spice Health's mobile testing labs.

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