

Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) Labs release initial results of Genome sequencing of mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2

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Government of India took cognizance of the reports of mutant variant of SARS- CoV-2 virus reported from UK and put in place a pro-active and preventive strategy to detect and contain the mutant variant.

This strategy includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:-

- i. Temporary suspension of all flights coming from UK with effect from the midnight of 23rd December 2020 till 31st December 2020.
- ii. Mandatory testing of all UK returnee air passengers through RT-PCR test. The samples of all UK returnees found positive in RT-PCR test to be genome sequenced by a consortium of 10 govt. labs i.e. INSACOG.
- iii. Meeting of the National Task Force (NTF) on Covid-19 on 26th December 2020 to consider and recommend Testing, Treatment, Surveillance and Containment Strategy.
- iv. Standard Operating Protocol for States/UTs to tackle the mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2 issued on 22nd December 2020.

The entire issue was examined at length by NTF on 26th December 2020 and the NTF concluded that there is no need to change either the existing National Treatment Protocol or existing Testing Protocols in view of the mutant variant. NTF also recommended that in addition to the existing surveillance strategy, it is critical to conduct enhanced genomic surveillance.

From 25th November to 23rd December 2020 midnight, about 33,000 passengers disembarked at various Indian airports from UK. All these passengers are being tracked and subjected by States/UTs to RT-PCR tests. So far only 114 have been found positive. These positive samples have been sent to 10 INSACOG labs (NIBMG Kolkata, ILS Bhubaneswar, NIV Pune, CCS Pune, CCMB Hyderabad, CDFD Hyderabad, InSTEM Bengaluru, NIMHANS Bengaluru, IGIB Delhi, NCDC Delhi) for genome sequencing.

A total of 6 samples of 6 UK returnee persons have been found to be positive with the new U.K variant genome. 3 in NIMHANS, Bengaluru, 2 in CCMB, Hyderabad and 1 in NIV, Pune.

All these persons have been kept in single room isolation in designated Health Care facilities by respective State Governments. Their close contacts have also been put under quarantine. Comprehensive contact tracing has been initiated for co-travellers, family contacts and others. Genome sequencing on other specimens is going on.

The situation is under careful watch and regular advice is being provided to the States for enhanced surveillance, containment, testing & dispatch of samples to INSACOG labs.

It is important to note that the presence of the new UK Variant has already been reported by Denmark, Netherlands, Australia, Italy, Sweden, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Japan, Lebanon and Singapore, so far.

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HFW/COVID-UK Mutant Strain/29th December 2020-1

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