



Fauci Says Americans Need to “Do Anything and Everything” Against Omicron. South African Doctors Say Variant Is “Mild”

As numerous European and Asian countries are enabling harsher domestic and [travel](#) restrictions in a bid to protect their populations from a recently discovered COVID strain — the Omicron variant — White House COVID advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci signaled that Americans will have to do “anything and everything” to fight against it.

Although the United States has shut down travel from a number of affected African countries, and though no cases of the Omicron variant have been detected in country yet, “inevitably it will be here, and the question is, will we be prepared for it?” Fauci asked on [ABC News](#) Sunday.



AP Images
Anthony Fauci

“The preparation that we have ongoing is what we do now with the Delta variant. It just needs to be revved up,” Fauci said. “It’s the bottom line: we need to get more and more people vaccinated and get the fully vaccinated boosted.”

Fauci touted the wearing of face masks, especially indoors, as another key to preparing for Omicron. The possibility of new lockdowns and mandates is not off the table, either, but such decisions will be “based on the science and the evidence, the way we always do,” Fauci said.

Speaking about the available information on Omicron, Fauci noted that its molecular characteristics “strongly suggest” it is much more transmissible than any previous variant. Among such worrisome features is a “disturbingly large number of mutations in the spike protein,” which is responsible for the coronavirus’ ability to bind to human cells.

Numerous mutations in that particular part of the virus also suggest that the vaccines that were designed using Alpha, or the original strain, are very likely to lose their potency against the new mutation just as they did against Delta. That manifested itself in a large number of so-called [breakthrough infections](#), when fully vaccinated people got the virus, spread it to others, and even landed in the hospital with COVID.

While Fauci mentioned none of that, he implied that a week or two is needed for the scientists to see how well the existing COVID-19 vaccines and treatments protect against the variant. Yet, looking at the “pattern of what is going on in South Africa,” which is experiencing a surge in infections, the variant is likely to have a “good degree of transmissibility advantage,” per Fauci.

In a separate interview with [NBC News](#), Fauci called on Americans to take Omicron “seriously” and “do whatever you can to mitigate against it,” i.e. getting vaccinated. Fauci called the variant a “clarion call”



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to get people vaccinated and boosted, since the shots increase the number of antibodies against the virus. Even though it is unclear how well the Omicron evades them, “It’s always better to be vaccinated than unvaccinated,” Fauci stressed.

Notably, in January, Fauci similarly called a U.K. variant of COVID a “clarion call” for people to “put vaccine hesitancy aside” and get the shots once they are available and also “double down” on following public-health guidance.

In the meantime, Fauci said he “did not know yet” if the strain caused more severe disease but reassured us that U.S. medical authorities were in constant contact with their South African colleagues. Fauci added that “hopefully” the cases are mild, but warned that the country has a relatively small proportion of people vaccinated, which needs to be accounted for when analyzing the impact of the virus.

The information coming from South African medics, however, is reassuring. On Sunday, Angelique Coetzee, the chairwoman of the South African Medic Association, [said](#) the Omicron variant results in mild cases with no “prominent symptoms”:

It presents mild disease with symptoms being sore muscles and tiredness for a day or two not feeling well. So far, we have detected that those infected do not suffer loss of taste or smell. They might have a slight cough. There are no prominent symptoms. Of those infected some are currently being treated at home.

Coetzee added that COVID comorbidities such as diabetes and heart disease still may contribute to the severity of the symptoms.

South African governmental adviser Professor Barry Schaub said he did not believe the strain would lead to a major new wave of serious illness.

According to the [Times of Israel](#),

“It’s unlikely that it’s going to cause more severe disease,” Schaub said. “Certainly what we’ve been seeing up to now ... the great majority of the patients have been mild. In fact, there hasn’t been a very substantial increase in hospital admissions so far.”

The doctor added that he thought the new wave of infections in his country “is going to be a lot less severe” because of the current level of immunity in the population.

Vaccine manufacturers, including Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson, whose stocks [soared](#) following news of Omicron’s emergence, [said](#) they are already working to alter existing vaccines against the new strain.

On Friday, the World Health Organization (WHO) [announced](#) Omicron is a “variant of concern,” since it showed properties that could make it more transmissible, more virulent, or more adept at eluding vaccines and therapeutics.

President Joe Biden is set to speak later Monday about the urgency of getting vaccinated against COVID, but [reportedly](#) is not expected to announce any new virus-related restrictions, beyond last week’s [move](#) to curtail travel from South Africa and seven other countries in the region, effective today.



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