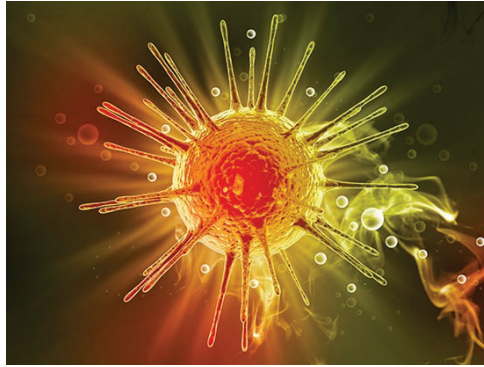


## Australia Raises Concerns Over Russian SARS-CoV-2 Variant B.1.1.317 Found In UK, Thailand, Switzerland Since December 2020 And Recently In Queensland

Australia medical researchers are raising concerns over a new SARS-CoV-2 variant that was found in Queensland in the last 5 days. The strain is designated the name: B.1.1.317.



According to the open access site for researchers, CoV-Lineages that details Pango lineages real time, the B.1.1.317 lineage is thought to have originated in Russia and has been circulating in countries like the United Kingdom, Thailand, Switzerland and Brazil since December 2020. [https://cov-lineages.org/lineages/lineage\\_B.1.1.html](https://cov-lineages.org/lineages/lineage_B.1.1.html) (roll down and check. B.1.1.31)

<https://www.facebook.com/CMGrama/posts/3569238989850522/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CMGrama/posts/3569238989850522/>

Medical experts are still in the midst of studying the variant to discover the mutations on it and also to assess whether it is more contagious.

However according to Russian medical experts, the B.1.1.317 variant contains the concerning mutation: N 501Y which is also found in the South African Strain B.1.351 and is known to evade neutralizing antibodies. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-021-01285-x>

Strains containing this mutation are also known to cause more severe conditions of the COVID-19 disease.

Also concerning is that new studies are emerging to show that the N501Y mutation severely impacts CD4 T cell responses, including antigen presentation on cells expressing Major Histocompatibility Complex (MHC) class II molecules. <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.02.02.429431v1>

The N501Y mutation is also believed according to studies to be more transmissible as a result of stronger binding between the virus and the ACE2 receptors.

<https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.02.14.431117v1>

Also Russian researchers are warning that along with 3 other identified mutations among the many other mutations on the B.1.1.317 strains, those initially found to exhibit mild or asymptomatic conditions upon initial infection were found to develop varying medical conditions later including severe organ damage. (More studies are being done to verify this and published data is expected on this soon.)

However to date, not much is still not known on this Russian variant and authorities worldwide are also trying to clamp down on news and data about emerging variants especially countries like the United States and The United Kingdom along with American tech and pharmaceutical companies that have vested interests in the current global vaccination programmes.

Dr Peter Collignon, a professor of Infectious Diseases at the ANU Medical School-Australia, said it was still too early to make any assumptions about this new strain of the virus appearing.

Professor Collignon told Thailand Medical News, " This is like a lot of other variants we hear about, the South African variant, there's a Brazilian variant, there's now a Californian variant, there's a New York variant. Some of them do spread more, but there seems to be a great overreaction to these strains. They spread the same way, they spread mainly by droplets, which means larger particles that infect people when they're close together, so all the things we've done to decrease the risk before should work against these strains."

Professor Collignon said cases like the one in Adelaide in November last year, where the new strain had "certain characteristics" like a short incubation period "was wrong." <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/nov/19/sa-covid-lockdown-experts-doubt-state-suffering-particularly-sneaky-strain>

He added, "The lockdowns we've had because of the UK strain, it really hasn't made any difference. So I think we run the real risk of overreacting. Some of them might spread more readily but they spread exactly the same way as all the other strains. So we just need to keep on doing what we've done very successfully."

Virologist Professor Dr Kirsten Spann from Queensland University of Technology said it was difficult to understand the "significance" of this variant.

Dr Spann said, "I've been sort of going through the literature and it seems there's not a lot reported at least about what the exact mutations are."

Currently Australian health authorities are only aware of two cases in Queensland, both of which were detected in hotel quarantine.

The infected individuals had travelled on Qantas flight QR898 from Doha.

According to Queensland health authorities, genomic testing is also being carried out on a third person who was on the same flight and who has tested positive to COVID-19.

It was reported that a fourth person on the same flight has also tested positive to COVID-19 but has since travelled to New Zealand.

Also all 74 travellers on the flight will undergo additional testing as they may have been exposed to the Russian variant.

It was also reported that seven more cases of coronavirus were detected in Queensland on Thursday, however it is not known if any of these cases are the Russian variant.

The variant is named as the Russian variant as it originated from there.

Professor Collignon said "We're becoming very xenophobic, I saw one headline or article from Russia ie they're not worried about the Russian strain, they're worried about the UK strain. So everybody becomes paranoid that whenever it's from somewhere else it's much worse and we need to put up more barriers, yet there's really no good evidence they spread any different way."

Many people are not aware of these variants or what they represent and they only react to the most talked about variants that are found in the media such as the B.1.1.7 variant from UK or the B.1.351 variant from South Africa or the P.1 variant from Brazil. In reality there are so many emerging variants with many concerning mutations found on them!

In countries like Thailand for instance, the masses are not even aware of the variants in the country due to controlled news and also lack of genomic sequencing data made to the public.

University of Queensland virologist Dr Kirsty Short said while the variant was discovered in Russia it might not have emerged there, which means its name might be a misnomer.

Professor Collignon said the variant was basically the same SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus with a different blueprint.

He said, "There are a few hundred of variants already. Any bacteria or virus changes in time-this occurs naturally. It may give it some ability to survive or spread more readily."

Dr Spann said mutations of the virus would continue to form in the years to come, similar to influenza.

She said, "We should be prepared that this is going to happen all the time, and it's not necessarily a cause for alarm. But then again there needs to be that constant surveillance of the SARS-CoV-2 virus genome globally because this will keep happening. We've already seen the UK strain the South African strain, it will keep happening so we need to be diligent in identifying them, but understanding the disease impact and transmissibility is going to be difficult."

Professor Collignon said he would not be surprised if certain variants spread more readily.

He said, "Have they changed so much that they are more infectious? It does appear to be the case with the UK strain. It's taken a couple of months to be sure the UK strain was more infectious. But is it due to the strain, or more young people moving it around? At the end of the day the people who are most at risk are people who are in the same room, close to people with the same symptoms. Hands might transmit it but it's not a large factor. That is not different in any of those strains."

At present there is no data or studies that show whether the existing COVID-19 vaccines still work on the Russian variant. Not enough is known about the Russian variant at this stage to be sure.

Dr Spann said at this stage it would depend on where the mutation was and if it changed the spike protein of the virus.

She said, "So fundamentally that the antibodies produced by the vaccine no longer bind to that spike protein that would have to be a very large mutation to actually fundamentally change that antibody virus binding reaction that we need for effective vaccine. Whether this mutation does that or not, I don't imagine anyone knows that yet, but I'm sure people are testing it."

Thailand Medical news has been warning since last year that numerous mutations would emerge some with concerning effects. While experts are at the moment only concerned about mutations that are able to spread more easily or evade antibodies or vaccines, little is being studied about mutations that can lead to stronger viral persistence or mutations that lead to varying medical conditions later on.

Also there is a need to monitor the emergence of more recombinant or reassortant SARS-CoV-2 strains which is more likely to happen considering the dynamics and kinetics of the current pandemic.

Please help share this article to as many people as possible as many American social media platforms and also search engines are trying to restrict is sharing data or studies with regards to the COVID-19 disease if it does not meet their agendas.