

## U.K. VARIANT MORE PREVALENT IN NORTH INDIA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

**Emergency care:** Many isolation centres had to be set up in Delhi as most hospitals are full. Shiv Kumar Pushpakar

The U.K. variant of the coronavirus, marked by increased infectivity, is distinctly more prevalent in several northern and central Indian States when compared with the southern ones, a perusal of genome sequencing data from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) shows. Two scientists from Central government labs that analyse national genome sample data told *The Hindu* that large gatherings in Punjab have significantly amplified transmission of the variant in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana.

“Punjab has a very unique trajectory in the rise of the B.1.1.7. There were at least four major clusters (super spreader events) marriages, farmer protests from February 1 to February 28 , that are responsible for large spikes. By March, Delhi was warned about a possible 15,000 critical cases,” Dr. Sujeet Singh, Director, NCDC said.

Though only a fraction — about 15,000 samples — of India’s caseload has been sequenced, data from 1,757 samples showed that in the northern States the proportion of the U.K. variant in the community was significantly higher than those isolated from international travellers and their contacts. The U.K. variant, according to the data available with *The Hindu* , comprises 1,666 of the 1,757 samples.

In Punjab, for instance, there were eight instances of the U.K. strain among international travellers and their contacts but 543 in the wider community; in Delhi this ratio was 91: 324. In Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, there were no reported variants in those with an international travel history but 26 and 23 cases respectively in wider community. In Haryana the ratio is 6:13. In Madhya Pradesh, the ratio was 4:51 and in Chattisgarh 1:14. However, such a pattern doesn’t hold, in fact is directly reversed, in Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu — other States with large case loads. There were more instances of the U.K. variant in the travellers and their contacts than in the wider community. In Maharashtra the ratio was 35: 29; in Kerala its 15:1 and in Tamil Nadu 14:1, in many instances diametrically opposite to the northern situation.

“What is unambiguous is that the U.K. variant was imported into Delhi and Punjab and that’s not surprising because of the presence of the international airport and there were significant amplifying events in Punjab that also spread to Delhi,” said Dr Anurag Agrawal, Director, CSIR-IGIB.

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