

# ICMR APPROVES INDIGENOUS KIT TO DETECT OMICRON

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology

Tracking the virus: A batch of swab samples being taken for RT-PCR testing for COVID-19. File photo

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has approved a testing kit for detecting the Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. The kit is manufactured by Tata Medical and Diagnostics and is named OmiSure. The kit will be used to confirm Omicron in patients with its S-Gene Target Failure (SGTF) strategy.

The ICMR's letter of approval dated December 30 said: "The tests have been performed as per the manufacturer's instructions. Responsibility for batch-to-batch consistency lies with the manufacturer."

The kit currently in use to detect Omicron in India has been developed by the U.S.-based scientific instrumentation company Thermo Fisher. It, too, uses the SGTF strategy to detect the variant.

The World Health Organization South-East Asia Region on Tuesday said that the focus should now be on enhancing genome sequencing in view of the Omicron variant.

"Diagnostic services are critical for public health. During an outbreak, timely information is needed to guide and tailor public health response to stop/ curtail disease spread. Hence, since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, one of the key areas of the WHO's support has been to strengthen laboratory capacities, with the focus on addressing inequalities in access to COVID-19 diagnostics tools," said Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region.

## Genomics consortium

The WHO is proposing to set up a SARS-CoV-2 genomics consortium in Southeast Asia this year. The consortium will help enhance genomic sequencing and surveillance.

This will also help improve the timely use of genomic data for public health decision-making and to strengthen preparedness and response to future outbreaks/ pandemics, added a release issued by the group.

Stating that challenges remain, Dr. Singh said that limited trained workforce and other resources are key barriers identified by countries for sustained long-term testing and sequencing capacities. In a bid to address this, the WHO is building a community of practice — sharing of experiences through webinars and sharing of information through platforms such as the regional laboratory network.

"With COVID-19 cases once again beginning to increase, we need to remain vigilant. Which means enhancing our capacities to quickly test and provide timely results, and conduct genome sequencing for new variants," Dr. Singh said.

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