

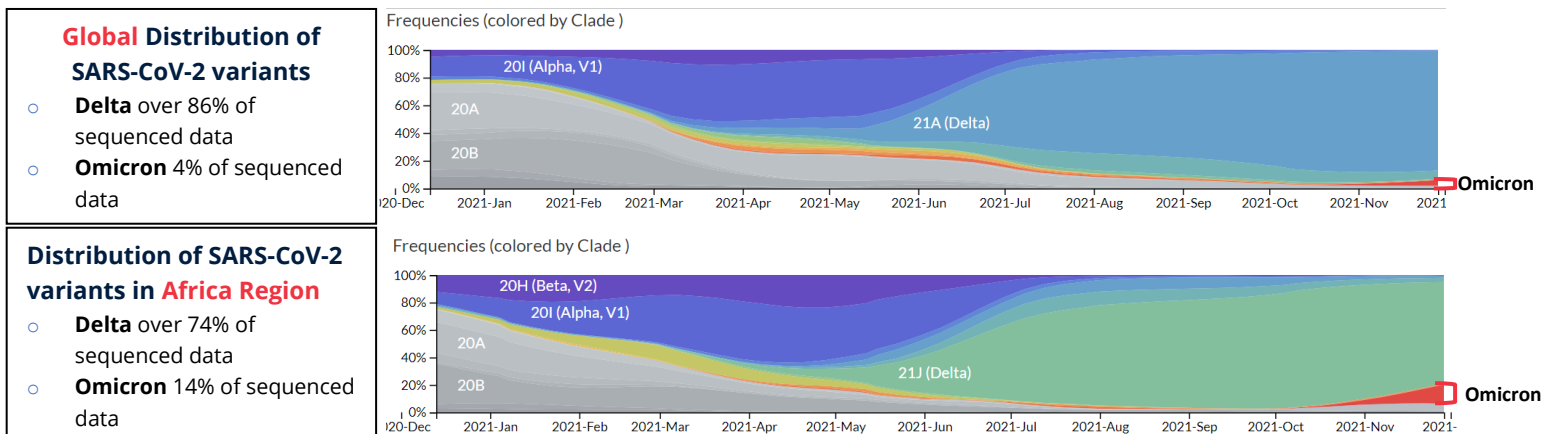
Why was Omicron labelled a variant of concern?

- There were several mutations found on the SARS-CoV-2 variant now named “Omicron,” many of which are concerning given the location of the mutations
- There appears to be an increased risk of transmissibility and/or re-infection with the new variant which necessitates greater observation ([WHO](#))

Existing Evidence

- Omicron appears to have gained momentum, spreading rapidly in locations such as South Africa – however, it remains to be seen how Omicron competes with other rapidly spreading variants such as the Delta variant which was not as dominant in South Africa as it is in other regions such as Europe or North America.
 - Current estimated reproductive rate of Omicron is still lower than the Delta variant – estimates will continue to be modified as we learn more
 - There is [some evidence](#) to support there is an increased risk of reinfection with Omicron following a previous infection of another SARS-CoV-2 variant, however this information is still undergoing peer-review.
 - Additional [non-peer-reviewed evidence](#) suggests that Omicron variant does not cause as severe disease, however reported hospitalization and deaths tend to lag behind case reporting, so this will continue to be monitored (most cases have been registered with younger age groups at lower risk)

Disribution of select variants worldwide (source: [Nextstrain GISAID data](#))



- Other regions, such as Europe for examples, reporting less than 1% of sequenced SARS-CoV-2
- Around 50 countries thus far have reported cases of the Omicron variant, with several now reporting cases that likely emerged due to secondary infection (related to community transmission not related to travel directly)

Best Practices to reduce risk

- **Get vaccinated** – this is still the best way to prevent severe illness and death due to COVID-19 with the strongest evidence-base for protecting yourself and others.
- **Wear a mask** – masking is one of the most effective ways to further reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Surgical or medical masks have been found to be even more effective than cloth masks, however, both are effective in reducing community-level transmission of COVID-19.
- **Practice physical distancing** – try to keep distance of at least 1 metre, meet outdoors whenever possible and open windows to improve air circulation in the room
- **Practice good hand hygiene** – wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face