

What does the new COVID variant first identified in India, mean for Ireland?

Independent Scientific
Advocacy Group

ISAG public meeting and press conference – 12pm, Wednesday 26 May 2021

As we see new variants of COVID19 spreading across the world, we remember the dire impact in January of the B.1.1.7 variant, first identified in Kent. There is growing concern that the variant recently discovered in India (B.1.617.2) and rapidly becoming the dominant strain in the UK, will spread here, causing a rapid fourth wave among the unvaccinated and the reimposition of even stricter restrictions.

Prof. Aoife McLysaght, TCD will discuss this and any questions you might have with Dr. Paul Dempsey this Wednesday. What can we do here to protect ourselves from this and future variants of COVID19? How might these affect us over the months and years ahead?

Delayed reaction allowed the B1.1.7 variant to enter and spread across Ireland, trapping us in lockdown for the last 6 months. We must not make the same mistakes again. Our government has chosen to largely rely on vaccination alone as the sole strategy for recovery from COVID19 and a basis for premature reopening before transmission has been halted. Our vaccine roll out has been good, and mandatory hotel quarantine has been highly effective in protecting us against importing the P1 variant of concern from the South American countries we were willing to apply it to. However, now we face the challenge of the equally worrisome B1.617 variants on our doorstep before we have achieved full population vaccine coverage.

Vaccination works well, and does reduce both infection and transmission, but the protection only arises after the vaccine has been administered and elicited an immune response. Notably, the level of protection rises from about 60% - 70% after the first dose, to about 85% - 90% after the second dose. In Ireland, 13.17% of adults are fully vaccinated, and a further 36.02% have received their first dose. Very recent data from the UK suggests that currently-approved vaccines are somewhat less effective against these new variants, but they still have useful benefits. Given the large number of unvaccinated people in this country, the apparently increased transmissibility combined with even partial reductions in vaccine effectiveness, especially amongst those receiving only a single dose, do represent an immediate threat and should temper our expectations of an exit strategy based on vaccines alone.

Managing our risk over the summer, and securing robust peace of mind beyond then, will require consistent application of mandatory hotel quarantine to all travellers from countries where variants of concern are common, including the United Kingdom. We also continue to advise the full activation

of local and regional public health to reduce case numbers as fast as possible, to finally end our third wave and put ourselves in a robust position to avoid a fourth, driven by B.1.617.2 or further new variants we can expect to emerge. We need to continue with our vaccination roll out as fast as possible but also need to keep new variants of concern at bay in the meantime

To attend, listen and ask questions, click here to register:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4kmtJx66SMaYcG3UCjDX3A

This will primarily be a Questions and Answers session. We welcome advance questions from members of the press, politicians, special interest groups and the public sent to: isagcovid@gmail.com , or ask them live.

Further Information:

The Independent Scientific Advocacy Group (I.S.A.G.) is a multidisciplinary, all-island, group of scientists, academics, and researchers who have come together to advocate for a SARS-CoV-2 elimination strategy for the island of Ireland.