

Covid-19: Variant B 11.529, Nu (Omicron)... Lift the patents on vaccines!

Monday 29 November 2021, by [PROUHET Frank](#) (Date first published: 28 November 2021).

The world should help southern Africa, not by blocking borders, but by lifting patents to vaccinate its population as soon as possible and prevent the global spread of the new variant.

Within hours, the news spread. A new Sars cov2 variant was sequenced, first in Botswana with three cases, then in South Africa with six cases. The new B.1.1.529 variant has a record 32 mutations on the spike protein. The spike protein, which allows the virus to enter human cells, is the basis of the entire vaccination strategy against Covid. This new variant would be more infectious, i.e. would enter human cells more easily thanks to these mutations, and would more easily escape the anti-Covid antibodies of vaccinated or cured patients. This potentially means that vaccines could be less effective in terms of protection against the new variant, whereas they were still protective against delta, and that patients who have already had covid could more easily become reinfected. But the key information for the future is transmissibility, i.e. the capacity to be transmitted from one individual to another, which is different from infectivity, the capacity to penetrate the cell.

There is little information on this last crucial point, as it will take time to establish it properly. However, some bad news is reported by Dr Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Officer of the UK's Health Security Agency. The temporal R, the rate of reproduction of the virus at a given time, has jumped to 2 in the Gauteng region of South Africa, where the new variant has been found. However, it is not known whether B.1.1.529 is already dominant in the region, and therefore responsible for the fact that one person infects two others, a figure that has almost doubled! So be careful.

Today we learn that the new variant was found in a young unvaccinated woman in Belgium, without any contact with Southern Africa. This may mean that the virus is already circulating outside its region of origin. However, the patient had travelled via Egypt and Turkey by plane. So there is also uncertainty. A person was found to be carrying the variant in Hong Kong, after a trip to Malawi. Israel has just announced its first case.

Eight European countries, plus Japan and Israel, immediately decided to close their borders to travellers from southern Africa. A decision that prompted a reaction from WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier, who said at a briefing in Geneva that « WHO recommends that countries continue to apply a scientific and risk-based approach when implementing travel measures (...) And that at this stage, again, the implementation of travel restrictions is not recommended ». The announcements and new restrictions sent the South African rand down 3% against the US dollar, its weakest level in a year. While the New York Stock Exchange opened lower.

While the emergence of the nu (Omicron) variant may further boost the pandemic, and its death toll, the only announcements concern transport restrictions. A real scandal, as we know that this type of measure has already been ineffective in blocking the delta variant! These are therefore very political announcements, and not very scientific, from governments of rich countries that have been

flattering vaccine nationalism from the start, and an illusory closure of borders. Yet the emergence of this new variant is a terrible indictment of all the policies of vaccine nationalism, which deprive poor countries, and in particular southern Africa, where the delta variant was already born, of vaccine doses.

A vaccine apartheid that means that of the 6.5 billion doses injected, only 2.5% were injected in Africa! A vaccine apartheid to defend the profits of Pfizer and Moderna. A vaccine apartheid that has been denounced for many months by activists fighting for the lifting of patents and intellectual property rights on vaccines, tests and anti-covid treatments. A vaccine apartheid that favours viral circulation, and therefore the emergence of variants. This endangers the effectiveness of vaccines.

On the contrary, the pandemic calls for solidarity, dose sharing, an urgent increase in production capacity, and an ultra-rapid vaccination campaign in southern Africa to slow down the spread of the virus and protect the world, as had to be done in June in the face of the viral explosion in India, which probably killed more than one million people. This policy has a name. It is the lifting of property rights, the lifting of patents! The capitalists are refusing to do this in defence of the \$1000 per second they get from the patents on covid vaccines. The July 21 editorial of the *British Medical Journal* did not hesitate to denounce this policy as « a crime against humanity ».

For both the nu (Ormicron) and delta variants, it is likely that the mutation arose in a person living with HIV/AIDS, with a profound decline in immunity, as a result of not being treated for HIV. For delta, this was suggested by infectious disease studies in Nelson Bay, South Africa. Yesterday « the sick are in the south, the treatments are in the north » for AIDS. And the pharmaceutical capitalists who dared to sue South Africa for its 1997 law allowing it to manufacture and import generic HIV drugs. This resulted in 400,000 more deaths. Now vaccine apartheid. A terrible conjunction.

On 30 November the WTO inter-ministerial meeting opens in Geneva. It is already a scandal that it is a trade body that is actually deciding on health policy in the face of the pandemic. It is a scandal that for a year the European Union, Macron and Switzerland have been blocking the request to lift intellectual property rights on covid. The price to pay is 10,000 deaths a day for a year! And now what we all feared, the emergence of a new variant. And the NGOs, trade unionists and activists from the South who wanted to go to Geneva to voice their anger were effectively banned from going to the WHO. Yesterday already with the difficulties in getting their vaccination recognised by Switzerland, today because they risk being blocked in airports, or wandering around Geneva.

For example, Fatima Hassan, the tireless South African advocate for the Health Justice Initiative, should not be able to go to Geneva and says: « *Black and brown people will be banned from travelling, but there will be no waiver. This is vaccine apartheid. The WTO, EU and UK don't like their many former colonial subjects saying this, but hiding the truth won't help. The travel ban is also anti-science, makes no sense. The countries that ban us from travelling have also prevented us from accessing vital vaccines along with them. The people who block the waiver are the ones who ban us from travelling. We warned when the waiver was first proposed: vaccinate everyone, everywhere, quickly, because of the variants. I was supposed to go to MC 12, but I can't - my flights go through areas that won't allow South Africans to land, Switzerland hasn't given me a vaccination certificate yet, even though I'm double vaccinated with Pfizer, which means I'd be eating outside in the cold and couldn't get into any buildings or cafes - so postpone MC 12 - yes please postpone.* » On 30 November, the opening day of the WTO session, a cry must go up. Lift the patents!

Lift the property rights. When? Now!

Frank Prouhet, French collective patents on covid vaccine, stop. Requisition! 26th november

P.S.

- Entre les lignes entre les mots. Published 28 November 2021 :
<https://entrelignesentrelismots.blog/2021/11/28/variant-b-11-529-nu/>

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