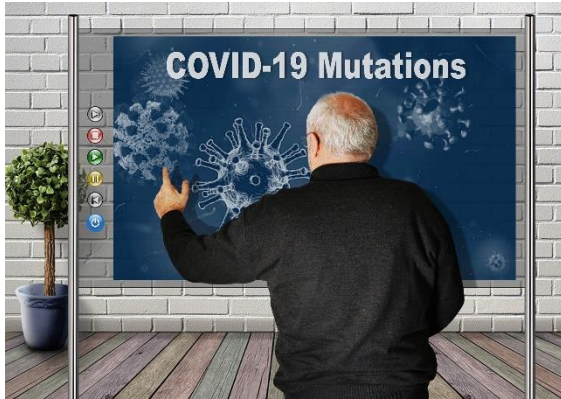


# Update: COVID 19 OMICRON VARIANT

## 30 NOVEMBER 2021 SNH

### Omicron alert :



This latest variant has put the WHO on high alert.

At the end of the coming three weeks we will know if the world has over-reacted or not by installing flight restrictions from and to South Africa and surrounding countries.

The WHO expert meeting of last Saturday has classified Omicron as a **Variant of Concern**.

This has been done on the basis that Omicron has demonstrated to be **highly transmissible**, in the province Gauteng -South Africa - this variant has already replaced most Delta cases within two weeks.

Testing has to reveal if the vaccines in use are giving the same level of protection or not. In case the pharma industry has to design updated mRNA vaccines, one estimates that these become available after 3 months from now.

### Is the omicron variant causing a more severe COVID infection ?

As of today it is unknown if omicron is causing a milder or more severe Covid infection. For the moment there are contradictory messages coming from South Africa:

Dr Angelique Coetzee [ Chairwoman of the South African Medical Association] is reporting mild cases as seen with her patients. The clinical picture is different: the complaints are now: Extreme tiredness, headaches and body-aches. According to Dr Coetzee and Dr Rudo Mathiva (Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, South Africa), younger people (20 – 40 years) may be more affected. Positively, they seem to exhibit milder cases and up to now there is not a-high influx of people with Omicron in the IC Units in South Africa.

### Are the laundry processes in place still adequate to kill the virus ?



From what we know, the answer is simply: Yes! Provided that these wash processes are following the rubber stamped guidelines for disinfection. Please keep in mind that all Corona virus variants are enveloped viruses. And thus the outer-shell is destroyed in a well-defined wash process. Partly by the pH and surfactants applied and finally by either thermal disinfection or by chemo-thermal disinfection.

## Is there any reason for concern that can be related to this Omicron variant ?

As we have stipulated in earlier reports: THE threat for the laundry and its staff is the increased transmission of this new variant.

Our strong recommendation is to make sure that all recommended hygiene measures are in place from the moment that the linen is collected → till the linen is loaded into the washing machine.

Note that aerosol formation is one of the larger risk factors next to contact with infected linen. Special attention is needed:

- Important; all linen to be handled as infected. Meaning bagged.
- **Appropriate PPE** has to be used for staff members that carry out the loading and unloading of the transport trucks, do the sorting and / or load of the washing machines.
- Maximise ventilation in the sorting area (And keep in mind to prevent an airflow from the sorting area into the rest of the laundry!)
- **Maintain social distancing** in the complete laundry.
- Prevent cross contamination via hard surfaces, door handles and computers. With special attention to the lunch room and coffee + vending machines !
- **The current CINET guideline reads: SARS CoV-2 infected linen should only be quarantined for five days when the right PPE isn't available for the sorting staff or the linen cant withstand higher temperature processing.**



### Looking into the crystal ball - Expectations:

This new variant demonstrates that Covid 19 is here to stay for a while. The positive news **might be** that Omicron causes a milder version whilst at the same time being highly transmissible.

**IF this observation will be proven** in the time to come than we are seeing a virus transition that in the end will become a similar virus as the yearly flue. And the expectation is that this could happen in the next 12 to 24 months.

Or with other words there will never be a “pre-pandemic normal”. There will always be a seasonal COVID – that will have the characteristics of a seasonal flue. Provided that the majority of the population appreciates and understands the need for a vaccination and the second disclaimer – of course – is that no variant will emerge that has capabilities of bypassing all existing defence systems.

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