

Dr Vikas Bhatia, Director AIIMS Bibinagar speaks on Hybrid immunity may help protect against Omicron



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The pattern of the pandemic in the last two years has shown us that a global health crisis like this can be dealt with collectively. Credit: Reuters Photo

Covid-19 has ravaged many countries and claimed millions of lives in the past two years. In India, too, a pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus had affected many between April and May 2021 and before that. The national sero-survey conducted post-second wave showed a seropositivity rate of about 80 per cent, including in children, which means this population has developed antibodies against the contagion, either through exposure to the virus or through vaccination.

After the second wave, the world's largest adult vaccination programme launched on January 16, 2021, by the prime minister accelerated coverage of the maximum eligible population in record time. Presently, over 50 per cent of the adult population is fully vaccinated, and more than 85 per cent of them have received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. It indicates that a large proportion of the population has developed a hybrid immunity through both natural infection and vaccination.

When a human body is exposed to a natural infection or is being inoculated, it generates an immune response that helps fight infections in the future. This helps protect the body against pathogens, such as Covid-19, which may lead to severe disease or even death. Hybrid immunity is believed to provide greater protection against SARS-CoV-2 variants.

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It has also been observed that people who have received one dose of vaccine after being infected have developed a fairly good level of immunity against Covid-19 mutants, including Omicron. First reported in South Africa, the Omicron variant has now been found in more than 57 countries. It has about 30 mutations on its spike protein and is said to be a few times more transmissible than the Delta variant, which caused the severe second wave in India and other countries. The Omicron variant has become a cause of great concern worldwide, with many countries imposing restrictions and taking severe measures to contain its spread.

Though the initial scientific evidence suggests that Omicron is causing a milder form of the disease with symptoms such as body aches, sore throat, cough, and mild fever, it is better to be more cautious and prepared.

Also Read – [Reinfections 3 times more likely with Omicron compared to Delta: South African research](#)

People worldwide have also realised that timely precautions can prevent the spread of the virus to a great extent. So, we need to follow personal protective measures such as wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, avoiding gatherings, and sanitising hands regularly. Besides, those who have not taken their first or second dose of vaccine should now take it on a priority basis.

Alongside, by making air travel, both domestic and international, as safe as possible through rigorous testing and screening at the airports, contact tracing, and quarantining of positive as well as suspected cases, we can prevent its spread at an early stage. Stringent surveillance will also help keep a tab on its outbreak in the country.

The pattern of the pandemic in the last two years has shown us that a global health crisis like this can be dealt with collectively. Many countries have found innovative ways to safeguard their population. Germany, for example, does not allow gatherings at restaurants until one is fully vaccinated or tested negative for Covid-19. Britain has reinforced masking and other restrictions. In November 2021, India too had launched the Har Ghar Dastak campaign, which had healthcare workers go door to door addressing various contextual concerns that may stop people from taking the vaccine. The ongoing campaign is receiving good support from the vaccine eligible population. Many have taken their scheduled vaccine, thus protecting their communities and society from the virus.

From our past experiences, we find that a virus dies its natural death, provided we keep ourselves safe and be patient till it does. After all, Covid is a community disease.

(Dr Vikas Bhatia is Director, AIIMS, Bibinagar)