

PAPER CLIPPINGS

29

ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: Editorial

ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE : 6/1/2021

England in lockdown

The rapid spread of the new COVID-19 variant should alert other countries to remain vigilant

In a bid to control the spread of the highly transmissible new COVID-19 variant (VOC 202012/01), the U.K. announced on Monday a fresh lockdown in London and southeast England, which is expected to be in force till mid-February. The decision comes after much dithering; the scientific advisory panel had recommended days before Christmas that the government consider a national lockdown, including shutting down educational institutions. As on January 4, the U.K. has reported 2.7 million cases and over 75,500 deaths, the second-highest toll in Europe. More than 50,000 new cases have been reported daily since December 29, 2020, with a peak of nearly 59,000 cases on January 4 and over 400 deaths daily. On Monday, more than 26,000 COVID-19 patients were admitted in hospitals, an increase of 30% from the previous week. Though the new variant does not cause increased disease severity or mortality, a surge in cases and hospitalisation can lead to more deaths. It is more transmissible, the reason why the reproduction number (number of people a person can infect) is 1.5-1.7; the spread is considered to be under control when the reproduction number is less than 1. Based on an analysis of cases and genome sequences of nearly 44,500 samples collected from England between September 21 and December 13, it was found that even during the previous lockdown, the new variant spread in many locations. This even as fresh cases were generally dropping due to reduced spread of the then dominant strain.

There is evidence that the earlier lockdown was effective in containing the previously predominant strain, suggesting that the new variant grew in absolute terms. The rapid spread of the new variant even during the previous lockdown might not reflect a general failure of control measures but highlights the inherent nature of the new variant to rapidly spread given its higher transmissibility. That areas with slower baseline virus spread also reported a slightly reduced spread of the new variant suggests that it is indeed possible to reduce if not suppress the transmission of the new variant if the lockdown is stricter and compliance is better. It is for this reason that unlike in the previous lockdown, schools and universities too are to be closed now. The new variant appears to affect a greater proportion of individuals under 20 years. The selective spread among the young might probably be more because educational institutions were open during the previous lockdown than due to the inherent nature of the virus. Since a resurgence of the new variant is likely when the lockdown is lifted, the focus is on accelerating vaccine roll-out so that much of the population is protected and transmission is cut. The spread of new variants should alert other countries, particularly South Africa where a problematic mutation has been found, to remain vigilant.