

Coronavirus Singapore

Man infected with 2 variants in 8 months recalls road to recovery

He's thankful symptoms caused by Omicron were mild compared with Delta Plus infection

Malavika Menon

Over the course of eight months, John (not his real name) contracted Covid-19 twice.

The 37-year-old permanent resident, who was infected with the Delta Plus variant while he was overseas in May last year, fell victim again – this time to the Omicron variant – while travelling to Singapore last month under the Vaccinated Travel Lane scheme.

Three days after he arrived here on Dec 10, John was informed that a fellow flight passenger tested positive for the virus.

John was asked to undergo a polymerase chain reaction test which came back positive.

The news left him dismayed, with memories of the challenges his family faced when they were all infected in May still fresh in his mind.

"The Delta Plus infection left me with body aches and a fever that lasted three days, and it took me a while to get better," he said.

"I was very worried for my wife as she experienced loss of appetite, extreme fatigue, body aches and fever for five days. The infection weakened her and she

took two weeks to fully recover."

Their daughter was asymptomatic.

First reportedly discovered in Europe in March last year, Delta Plus is a subvariant of Delta and people infected with it exhibit similar symptoms.

John's 60-year-old mother-in-law and 76-year-old grandmother, who were also infected in May, managed to make a full recovery. Both were fully vaccinated while John and his wife were not then.

He said: "With the Omicron variant, I had only a scratchy throat, but I was thankful my wife and child were still overseas as they too might have been infected again if they were with me."

He was admitted to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) for eight days before he was

discharged after testing negative.

John said he is thankful his recent infection was mild, unlike his previous one in May. This time, his symptoms subsided after four days.

John, who completed two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine in October and November last year, believes the milder nature of Omicron and being fully inoculated offered him more protection against severe illness when he was reinfected.

Dr Choy Chiaw Yee, a consultant at NCID, noted that the risk of hospitalisation for those infected with Omicron is about one-third that of Delta, and Omicron seems to cause fewer deaths as well.

"Although this may seem promising, it is important to note that the Omicron variant is noted to be more transmissible than the Delta variant, and also more likely to in-

fect people who previously had Covid-19," she said.

Dr Choy highlighted that vaccination is vitally important for people to guard against severe illness, with an 81 per cent reduction in the risk of hospitalisation for those who have three doses of a vaccine compared with unvaccinated Omicron cases.

"The risk of hospitalisation is lower for Omicron cases with symptomatic or asymptomatic infection after the second or third dose of vaccine," she noted.

While Omicron seems to cause a milder infection than Delta, Dr Choy cautions that its transmissibility is a cause for concern.

She said: "If the number of Omicron cases continue to rise unchecked, the number of hospitalised patients and deaths will correspondingly rise and still put a burden on the healthcare system.

"It is therefore vitally important for the public to complete their vaccination by taking their booster dose if they have not done so."

Singapore recorded 832 new cases of the Omicron variant on Friday, up from 549 a day earlier.

More than 290,000 Covid-19 cases have been reported so far.

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LONGORDEAL

The Delta Plus infection left me with body aches and a fever that lasted three days, and it took me a while to get better.



JOHN (not his real name), on the first time he was infected in May last year.

Some Omicron patients hit by night sweats; no such cases seen locally

As the number of individuals infected with Omicron continues to rise worldwide, some are reporting a unique symptom associated with the Covid-19 variant – night sweats.

According to the Mayo Clinic, night sweats are repeated episodes of extreme perspiration that may

soak your clothes or bedding.

They are commonly associated with conditions such as anxiety disorders, thyroid disease or cancer.

While Omicron patients in South Africa and Britain have complained of night sweats, this has yet to be reported among local cases.

Dr Choy Chiaw Yee, consultant at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, said night sweats remain a rare symptom of the Omicron variant.

She said that based on early observation, individuals with the Omicron variant experience flu-like symptoms such as headache,

fever, cough, general body pains and fatigue.

"Individuals with the Delta variant experience symptoms such as fever, loss of smell or taste, cough, shortness of breath and diarrhoea," she added.

Dr Hsu Li Yang, an infectious diseases expert at the National Univer-

sity of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, noted that night sweats were hardly reported with previous variants of the virus and that this is an uncommon symptom among those infected with Omicron.

"In general, most infected persons will have mild cold or flu-like

symptoms. Vaccinated persons in particular will be either asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.

"The Omicron variant is more transmissible and has a shorter incubation period, but thankfully, it is a less virulent variant, even for unvaccinated individuals," he said.

Malavika Menon

Omicron wave poses steep slope, but S'pore better prepared now: Experts

Linette Lai
Health Correspondent

Will Singapore's Omicron wave be shaped like a plateau, with a flat top? Or will it look more like a mountain, with steep slopes and a sharp peak?

The latter is more likely, says infectious disease modelling expert Alex Cook, an associate professor at the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

"I would anticipate that we will see a fairly sharp peak, like what South Africa has had, and it will decay after that," he told The Sunday Times last week. "It will only be after that point that we get to a stable number, with lower numbers of infections."

Just how steep the slopes of the next wave are will depend on the restrictions Singapore has in place.

"It could be that we have a lower, longer, slower burn, and we maintain the measures that we currently have in place," said Prof Cook, vice-dean of research at the Saw Swee Hock School.

"That would be better for the healthcare system, but it's probably harder for us as individuals because we want to get it over and done with."

The Omicron variant has spread like wildfire all over the world since it was first detected in South Africa last November, with Australia, Britain, South Korea and the United States all feeling its impact.

But the silver lining is that infections generally seem milder, with fewer hospitalisations and deaths reported despite soaring case numbers.

In Singapore, the variant is spreading much more slowly than it is in European and North American cities because of the country's safe management measures, said Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of the Saw Swee Hock School.

He added: "Certainly, the Omicron variant has the potential to spread very quickly, especially in the absence of community measures and mask wearing, such as what we have seen overseas."



Nine out of 10 people in Singapore – or nearly five million people – have now completed the basic vaccination regimen and half the population have received booster shots. This will help protect individuals and the community against the Omicron variant, said Assistant Professor Hannah Clapham from the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

The number of Covid-19 cases here has been steadily climbing in recent weeks, with Omicron making up a growing proportion of each day's new infections.

Singapore recorded 832 new cases of the Omicron variant on Friday, up from 549 a day earlier.

These numbers mean that Singapore will soon face an Omicron wave, with 10,000 to 15,000 cases a day a distinct possibility.

But apart from the new variant being less severe than Delta, the country's circumstances are also very different from when Delta first hit.

On April 1 last year – the date of Singapore's first Delta case as stated by global information sharing database GISAID – the country was still pursuing a zero-Covid-19 policy instead of treating the virus as endemic.

Fewer than one million people were fully vaccinated at the time, with daily case numbers in the double-digits and the vast majority of infections imported. Air travel had slowed to a trickle and quarantine-free travel was not an option.

BE PREPARED FOR OUTBREAKS

As it is said, no one is safe until everyone is safe... We must always be prepared to face waves of Covid-19 outbreaks.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LUO DAHAI, from the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, noting that new variants are always evolving and spreading.

The Delta wave eventually peaked in October, with the country seeing on average 3,000 new cases daily.

In contrast, Singapore now faces the impending Omicron wave in very different circumstances.

For one thing, it has begun treating the virus as endemic.

On Dec 2, the same day that Singapore detected its first imported Omicron case, it also reported 1,050 community cases.

The country has embarked on vaccinated travel lane arrangements allowing for quarantine-free travel, although ticket sales have been temporarily curbed to buy the country time to gear up for the next wave of infections.

Importantly, nine out of 10 people – or nearly five million people – have now completed the basic vaccination regimen and half the population have received their booster shots.

These shots will help protect individuals and the community, said Assistant Professor Hannah Clapham, also from the Saw Swee Hock School. "But even with boosters, the transmissibility of Omicron

means we should still expect to see a substantial number of cases."

However, Prof Cook said that once Singapore is confident that Omicron will not overwhelm the healthcare system and nears completion of its nationwide booster roll-out, it should push forward with reopening.

"Once we're confident enough about our ability to 'tahan' Omicron, we should be bold with reopening," he added, using a Malay word meaning "to withstand".

Yet even as it does so, the country must stand ready to do battle again.

Associate Professor Luo Dahai from the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine said that new variants are always evolving and spreading as a universal vaccine is not available.

"As it is said, no one is safe until everyone is safe," said Prof Luo, whose research focuses on infection and immunity. "We must always be prepared to face waves of Covid-19 outbreaks."

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