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Covid-19: No AY.4.2 cases in Maharashtra, less than 0.1% across India

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MUMBAI: Maharashtra has no Covid-19 case caused by the new Delta descendant, AY.4.2, so far but some cases have been detected across the country. The sub-lineage accounts for “below 0.1%” of cases so far, said the latest update posted by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) monitoring the emergence of new variants late on Wednesday.

AY.4.2 is considered to be the cause for the sudden surge in cases in Europe, especially the UK, but it hasn’t yet been associated with more severe Covid or deaths. Scientists from the UK and Israel have estimated that AY.4.2 spreads 10-17% faster than Delta, which has been considered the most contagious variant so far.

AY.4.2 has been dubbed Delta plus as it carries mutations from

Delta as well one of the Delta derivatives named AY.4.

“There is no AY.4.2 in Maharashtra, but we had AY.4 cases in the state,” said Dr Pradeep Vyas, additional chief secretary (health) of the state government. “To avoid the confusion between AY.4 and AY.4.2, it has now been decided to rename AY.4 as AY.33,” he added.

In the last two months, the proportion of AY.33 reported in Maharashtra increased significantly. In July, it accounted for 5% and Delta for 82% (1,954) of the total samples. In August, AY.33 and Delta accounted for 42% (779

samples) and 32% (597 samples), respectively, of the samples put through genetic sequencing. In September, almost 75% of the Covid-positive samples had AY.33 while 15% were Delta.

Vyas said the nomenclature is not important for public health purposes as the treatment of Covid or public health measures (such as sealing of buildings) would not change for Delta or AY.33. "However, knowledge of variants is important for manufacturing vaccines against Covid," he added.

Dr Nerges Mistry of the Foundation of Medical Research said: "We need to wait and watch before we can say that AY.4.2 is more transmissible or responsible for more severe disease."

On Wednesday, the latest INSACOG report said Delta (B.1.617.2 and AY.x) continued to be the main variant of concern (VOC) in India. "No new VOI (variant of interest) or VOC are noted in India," the report said.

About renaming AY.4 as AY.33, the report said: "It has been noted that due to greater diversity of Delta in India, PANGO (Phylogenetic Assignment of Named Global Outbreak Lineages) classifications may sometimes be inaccurate, especially for new sub-lineages."

Mistry, who is not connected with INSACOG, said definitions of variants would keep changing as tools of detection change. INSACOG is further examining the data on AY.33.