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Press Release

Omicron wave in Sri Lanka is not too far away - take the BOOSTER DOSE without delay and strictly adhere to health guidelines

The Omicron variant of corona virus is spreading rapidly around the world, and has superseded the Delta variant in most countries. Even with the limited sequencing capacity available, 47 patients infected with Omicron have been detected so far in Sri Lanka. The situation in the West and South Africa shows that it spreads extremely fast. For example, Ireland recorded more Covid-19 cases over the holiday period (120,000 cases from 25 – 31 December 2021) than all of 2020 (91,779 cases), according to the country's department of health.

While Omicron is probably milder than the Delta variant, as it is transmitted much more efficiently, many more people will be infected and therefore hospital capacities may be exceeded due to the sheer number of people affected. Many hospital workers in the west are infected and are in quarantine which can further affect the health care services adversely.

In April 2021, many Sri Lankans ignored health precautions and this resulted in a wave of infections due to the much less infectious Alpha variant, and thereafter the Delta variant. Almost 15,000 people died and the hospital capacity was stretched to the limit. In spite of this bad experience, AMS notes with dismay, that history is repeating itself. Shops, bars, 31st night parties etc. were jam-packed. This occurred while the Omicron variant was amongst us. It is therefore inevitable that the Omicron variant will cause a massive wave of infection during the coming weeks.

The only way to tackle this wave would be to get vaccinated, wear a mask, keep a safe distance, open windows for adequate ventilation, clean your hands and cough and sneeze safely. We need to continue to take all above precautions even after taking vaccine doses.

Almost 85% of the target population in Sri Lanka (> 16 years) have been vaccinated with 2 doses. However, 2 doses of Astra Zeneca or Pfizer are not effective in preventing infection especially from the omicron variant. For example, a study in the UK showed that, 15 weeks after two doses of the Astra Zeneca (AZ) vaccine, protection against clinical disease became zero. The corresponding figure for Pfizer was 34%. However, a booster dose of Pfizer given to people vaccinated with 2 doses of AZ vaccine boosted the effectiveness against clinical disease to 70%. It is quite probable that the vaccines would prevent severe disease in most people.

However, in Sri Lanka only 25% of the target population have taken the booster. The rest are at risk of contracting clinical disease with Omicron. Therefore, AMS strongly urges everyone to take the booster, in order to reduce chances of clinical disease, protect the vulnerable, prevent hospital capacity being overwhelmed and prevent a lock down which could lead our country to further economic disaster.

Thank you

Yours sincerely,

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a prominent upward stroke followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal tail.

Dr LakKumar Fernando
President-AMS

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a large 'R' followed by the name 'Gnanasekeram' in a cursive script.

Dr R Gnanasekeram
General Secretary- AMS