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# COVID prevention: Small things that matter

These days all over the world discussions, studies, etc. are going on about the latest variant of COVID-19. It is called Omicron. It seems no matter what the variant is, COVID-19 will do several rounds in the world before fading away from the scene. Until then people living all over the world need to protect their lives from COVID-19 no matter what the variant is and how strong it is. Fortunately still COVID-19 has given the people a golden chance. That is not changing the way of infecting people. That means no matter what the variant is and how strong it is, we have to follow the same old set of basic health guidelines and the operational guidelines.

No matter which new and strong variant of COVID-19 enters the world and Sri Lanka, prevention is the same as usual. These preventive measures have not changed that much since the world was hit by COVID-19 in December 2019.

It is very simple and cheap to prevent COVID-19 individually and it is costly to prevent or control it as a country or by the nation as a whole. Therefore the main focus should be on preventing the disease individually rather than as the entire country. Closing the face is much easier and cheaper than closing the country.

## Health guidelines

Individually we all can act fast and do prevention, no matter what the variant is. Since we already know all basic health guidelines and all operational guidelines (for institutions), now we have to pay our attention towards the small / minor things.

Flushing a common toilet is one such thing. We have to use public toilets all the time when we go out and work in offices etc. According to Consultant doctors who handle COVID-19 patients every day during their daily work, we need to close the lid of the commode and flush it before and after using the public toilet.

According to them, aerosols are being created inside small toilets whenever we flush the commode. Therefore we need to avoid creating aerosols. Closing down the lid and flushing is the best way of doing it.

By now a lot of people ignore all health guidelines all the time while a handful of them strictly follow all of them all the time. The most ignorant people are those who had COVID-19 and survived. May be they think that now they have a type of 'super immunity' that protects them from all variants. This is only a myth and all of them can get infected with various variants at any time no matter whether they had COVID-19 or not.



Even full immunization does not prevent getting infected. The vaccines only protect lives from death and ICU/ HDU admissions.

Those mythical beliefs of people put innocent vulnerable people in trouble and it is possible for them to get infected with COVID-19 and die

because of the ignorance of others. This issue is very serious inside state and private offices. The employees who got infected and survived ignore all health guidelines all the time putting all the others in danger. Managements do monitoring

very rarely and therefore they can very easily ignore health guidelines.

## Omicron variant

The innocent employees who are at risk have no voice at all against those who ignore basic health

guidelines. To make the issue worse, some management forces employees to keep air conditioning on without opening doors and windows.

The repercussions may be deadly ones Omicron enters Sri Lanka in future because no country in the

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world can prevent the entrance of variants 100 percent.

It is very pathetic to see how some people do not wear a standard mask properly after two years of the arrival of COVID-19. They rarely wash their hands and when they wash their hands it is without soap. Still only some people use standard hand sanitizer. It seems they don't care about dying from COVID-19.

While some people are acting in a very ignorant way some other people waste their time, money and energy for useless things such as wearing gloves instead of using a hand sanitizer. They touch the face with the gloves unintentionally. Some are cleaning money. What we need to do is washing hands with soap or using a quality hand sanitizer after handling money. Some others are wearing unfitting and uncovering masks with face shields. Some are covering the entire body while wearing loose masks. Some are wearing double masks without pinching the bendable top edge of the mask around the bridge of the nose.

The worst example is given by the television channels to the innocent people who believe anything shown over the television. The television presenters wear face shields without masks and sometimes they never wear masks. The individuals who visit to participate in various television programmes do not wear masks. Maybe showing their faces over the television is more important for them than staying alive. It is the same with taking group photos.



According to the WHO, on November 26, 2021, WHO designated the variant B.1.1.529 a variant of concern, named Omicron, on the advice of WHO's Technical Advisory Group on Virus Evolution (TAG-VE). This decision was based on the evidence presented to the TAG-VE that Omicron has several mutations that may have an impact on how it behaves, for example, on how easily it spreads or the severity of illness it causes. Here is a summary of what is currently known.

## Current knowledge about Omicron

Researchers in South Africa and around the world are conducting studies to better understand many aspects of Omicron and will continue to share the findings of these studies as they become available.

**Transmissibility:** It is not yet clear whether Omicron is more transmissible (e.g., more easily spread from person to person) compared to other variants, including Delta. The number of people testing positive has risen in areas of South Africa affected by this variant, but epidemiologic studies are underway to understand if it is because of Omicron or other factors.

**Severity of disease:** It is not yet



clear whether infection with Omicron causes more severe disease compared to infections with other variants, including Delta. Preliminary data suggests that there are increasing rates of hospitalization in South Africa, but this may be due to increasing overall numbers of people becoming infected, rather than a result of specific infection with Omicron. There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with Omicron are different from those from other variants. Initial reported infections were among university students— younger individuals who tend to have more mild disease—but

understanding the level of severity of the Omicron variant will take days to several weeks. All variants of COVID-19, including the Delta variant that is dominant worldwide, can cause severe disease or death, in particular for the most vulnerable people, and thus prevention is always key.

## Effectiveness of prior SARS-CoV-2 infection

Preliminary evidence suggests there may be an increased risk of re-infection with Omicron (ie, people who have previously had COVID-19 could become re-infect-

ed more easily with Omicron), as compared to other variants of concern, but information is limited. More information on this will become available in the coming days and weeks.

**Effectiveness of vaccines:** WHO is working with technical partners to understand the potential impact of this variant on our existing countermeasures, including vaccines. Vaccines remain critical to reducing severe disease and death, including against the dominant circulating variant, Delta. Current vaccines remain effective against severe disease and death.

**Effectiveness of current tests:** The widely used PCR tests continue to detect infection, including infection with Omicron, as we have seen with other variants as well. Studies are ongoing to determine whether there is any impact on other types of tests, including rapid antigen detection tests.

**Effectiveness of current treatments:** Corticosteroids and IL6 Receptor Blockers will still be effective for managing patients with severe COVID-19. Other treatments will be assessed to see if they are still as effective given the changes to parts of the virus in the Omicron variant.

