

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

January 24, 2021

## “Worsening New COVID-19 Dangers and Concerns”

Recently, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, announced that COVID-19 is now the leading cause of death in the United States. Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse, it does. COVID-19 has now surpassed heart disease and cancer as the leading daily cause of death in the U.S. We are now being informed that the coronavirus variant detected in South Africa poses a "significant re-infection risk" and raises concerns over vaccine effectiveness. Several new variants—each with a cluster of genetic mutations—have emerged in recent weeks, sparking fears over an increase in infectiousness as well as suggestions that the virus could begin to elude immune response, whether from prior infection or a vaccine. These new variants, detected from Britain, South Africa and Brazil, have mutations to the virus' spike protein, which is key in vaccination immunity. And it is one mutation in particular—known as E484K and present in the variants detected in South Africa and Brazil but not the one from Britain—that has experts particularly worried about immunity "escape." Another variant found there—called 501Y.V2—was resistant to neutralizing antibodies built up from prior infection. In short, it resists “monoclonal antibodies,” which helped in the recovery of President Trump. The 501Y.V2 lineage is largely resistant to neutralizing antibodies elicited by infection with previously circulating lineages. In other words, the immune response is not working against this variant. Experts said, “This suggests that, despite the many people who have already been infected with SARS-CoV-2 globally and are presumed to have accumulated some level of immunity, new variants such as 501Y.V2 pose a significant re-infection risk.” Also, this might additionally affect the use of convalescent plasma as a treatment for COVID-19. This variant could spread more widely in the coming months. James Naismith, Director of the Rosalind Franklin Institute, said the findings are "not good news but it's not unexpected.” On the positive side, the fast-spreading British UK strain, known as B.1.1.7, found that the variant would not be able to evade the protective effect of current vaccines. This new B.1.1.7 variant has been estimated to be 50% more easily transmitted than common variants and may have 30% higher mortality. Just as with COVID, these variants appear to spread primarily through the air rather than on surfaces. With people possibly having more virus in their bodies and the virus being more infectious, everyone should take extra care and precautions. Wearing face masks and social distancing are essential. Pay attention to the type of face mask you use, and how it fits.

In the America that I love, we must continually update ourselves regarding COVID-19. Try to find the reliable scientific truths. Stay safe and healthy.

**Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.**

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

[rhowesmd@hughes.net](mailto:rhowesmd@hughes.net) | [www.iwillfindthecure.org](http://www.iwillfindthecure.org)

