

Delta Variant and Delta Plus Variant are Spreading Rapidly

The Delta coronavirus variant is spreading across the U.S. and is becoming an increasing percentage of the cases nationwide.

This Fall, we will have International students arriving from countries where the Delta variant is rampant. Australia has now placed several of its largest cities in complete lockdown. Other reports of concern from USA Today include the following:

"Variants are wreaking havoc worldwide. Several of Australia's major cities are under lockdown following a recent outbreak of the Delta variant. A surge of the Delta variant in Indonesia has left the country 'on the edge of a COVID-19 catastrophe,' the Red Cross said Tuesday. And Hong Kong says it will ban all passenger flights from the U.K. starting Thursday to curb the spread of variants."

A mutation from the Delta variant, called Delta plus, is rising across a dozen countries. Indian labs identifying and tracking the spread of the variant identified three main concerning characteristics of Delta plus: Increased transmissibility, an increased attack on lung cells, and possible reduction in monoclonal antibody response or possible resistance to vaccines and immunity."

The World Health Organization (WHO) **has urged fully vaccinated people to continue wearing masks indoors and practice social distancing as the Delta variant, which is thought to be more contagious, continues to surge in many parts of the world, including the U.S.** The worldwide death rate from the Delta variant is increasing. In some countries it is up eight times.

Meanwhile, in May, the CDC advised vaccinated Americans they no longer needed to wear masks indoors. So, what are we to believe? Masks or no masks? There are people on campus who are not vaccinated and are not identified as such. We also have people on campus whose children are not yet eligible for vaccination. So long as these situations persist, UT should be cautious and deferential to faculty preferences for running their classrooms.

From USA Today:

"Until we better understand how and to who the Delta variant is spreading, everyone should focus on maximum protection," the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health said Monday. The delta variant now accounts for 50% of active cases in Los Angeles and about 1 in 5 of cases around the country."

We couldn't agree more.

Faculty have expressed concerns about the UT reopening procedures for this Fall. Because the Delta variant is increasing, the Postel Administration must take a fresh look at the reopening policy and procedures. Employee input must be solicited. The failure to reexamine this issue based on emerging data would be negligent and irresponsible.