

May 30, 2025

The Editor
The Daily Mail

Dear Editor,

Brett Lackey's article "[New Covid variant NB.1.8.1 behind resurgence of the virus in Asia has hit Australia](#)" in your publication of May 28 contains considerable misinformation about COVID in the Hong Kong SAR that I would like to set straight.

The writer quoted me as saying that "the evidence suggested the virus, which is a descendant of the Omicron strain, could be mutating to be more resistant to vaccines", which is not true.

Contrary to Mr Lackey's contention, the World Health Organization's risk assessment found no evidence suggesting that the associated disease severity of NB.1.8.1 is higher compared to other circulating variants. Currently approved COVID-19 vaccines are expected to remain effective for this variant against symptomatic and severe cases. The additional public health risk posed by NB.1.8.1 is evaluated to be low, on par with the global level.

Now, COVID-19 is a cyclical endemic disease. Epidemiological data from Hong Kong and other regions show that generally there are periodic outbreaks about every six to nine months. However, the timing of the increase in the activity level of this disease may vary from region to region depending on local factors, such as herd immunity of a given population and changes in circulating strains and vaccination rates.

In general, the symptoms of COVID-19 infection among the general public in Hong Kong are mostly mild, similar to other common respiratory infections. As such, there is no need for the public to be overly concerned. However, high-risk groups (the elderly, young children, people with underlying illnesses and the immunocompromised) are more likely to develop severe symptoms. Therefore, COVID-19 vaccination is important to protect these high-risk groups.

For more information on relevant public health advisories by the Hong Kong SAR Government's Department of Health, please see this [press release](#).

We are disappointed that the report was not fact-checked and fell short of your usual high standards and we would appreciate a timely clarification.

Your sincerely,

Dr Edwin Tsui
Controller of the Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

(ENDS)