

COVID-19 in Algeria: The Variants and the Risk of a Third Wave

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to describe the emergence of the new variants on coronavirus in Algeria and the risk of a third wave of the COVID-19 disease.

Keywords: COVID-19, Algeria, new variants, third wave



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Dear Editor,

The humanity will never forget the year 2020, where a new coronavirus disease called COVID-19 has spread in all countries around the world [1]. This viral disease which has emerged in the City of Wuhan in China in December 2019 has been attracted until now by more than 150 millions persons leading to 3.1 millions deaths. The good news is that the number of recovered which has reached to 129 million [2].

Algeria like other countries has reported its first case on February 25th, 2020. Since then, the number is still increasing reporting until now 122 108 cases and 3.253 deaths [3]. However, the evolution of the disease has shown multiple facets in relation with the applied preventive measures. The epidemiological curve has shown until now tow important peaks. One first peak in the months of June-July and the second in the last September 2020. these peaks were principally associated with the alleviation of the preventive actions. In fact, Algeria was one of the first northern African countries to close their border and to decrease the state of emergency since March, 12th 2020 with closure of schools, universities and national/partial containment. These measures which were classified as drastic by the Oxford Government COVID-19 Stringency Response Tracker (OxCGRT (index of 92 in a scale of 100)) [4] were accompanied by a relative control in the two first months. This period has been however

followed by an increasing of the daily cases in the last of June and the beginning of July reaching a number of 675 cases on July 24th, 2020. These numbers have been associated with a saturation of hospital capacities in certain departments [5]. This peak was due principally to the alleviation of preventive measure. The second peak was reported in the months of November-December and was more important than the first one reporting the highest number of daily cases of 1133 case in November, 24th 2020. This number is also associated with the increasing of testing capacities from 50 test/day in the first period to more than 2500 tests/days.

In the three last months, the situation seemed to bee in a relative stability characterized by the diminution of hospitalized cases and the decreasing of confirmed cases reporting the lowest number since about a year in March 28th, 2021 (86 new cases/day) despite the low vaccination number (about 75000 vaccinated persons (·00.1% of the total population) [6]. These diminution has been followed by an and alleviation of leaving of containment in most of departments except some departments (9/58) where the curfew is conducted from 00 PM to 4 AM. This decreasing of number is of cases has been associated by some researchers the fact that the borders are still closed contrarily the neighboring countries of Tunisia and Morocco where the number has shown a net increasing in the last months. This “incomprehensive” decreasing has pushed some

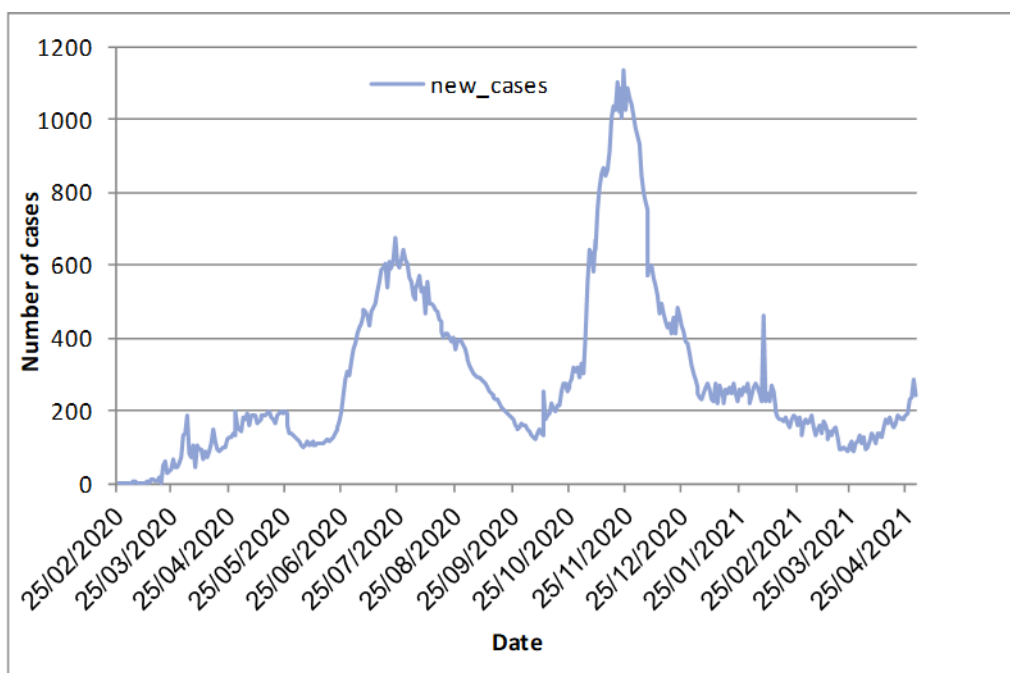


Figure 1. COVID-19 daily cases in Algeria

specialists to adopt the theory of herd immunity estimating that the low number of declared cases is just related the weak testing capacities and also to the high number of asymptomatic cases. In a pilot study, it has been shown that in a serological survey of 1000 persons, 50% among them were affected [7]. However, despite the border closure, Algeria reported the first cases affected by the British (B.1.1.7) on February 25th, in the department of Algiers March and the Nigerian variants (B.1.525) on March 11th, 2021 [8]. The Nigerian variant was first reported in the departments of Algiers, the east border departments of Tebessa and Souk Ahras and the southeast departments of Ouargla and In Salah. Since then, the number of cases is in a net increasing in association with an increasing of daily cases and hospitalized persons reporting a number of 286/days on April, 2021, a number which was not reported since January 1st, 2021 (287 cases). The total number of cases affected by the British and the Nigerian variants has reached 143 and 230 cases respectively. The most affected department by the British variant are Algiers, Blida and Oran in the North while the most affected by the Nigerian variant are Algiers, Laghouat, Eloued, Oran and Medea.

The question is now what will be the evolution of these strains in Algeria and what will be the preventive actions against?. The first measures have been applied on April, 29th 2020 where the curfew were renewed in 19 departments.

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