Razor Blade Variant

Why in News?

The variant NB.1.8.1 (Nimbus) is under the spotlight due to its unique 'razor blade' throat symptom and increasing global spread.

- **Razor Blade variant** – The variant is officially named NB.1.8.1, which is a descendant of the Omicron variant.
- The term "razor blade" comes from patients reporting an extremely **painful sore throat**, like "swallowing a razor blade."
- **WHO classification** – On May 23, 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) listed NB.1.8.1 as a Variant Under Monitoring (VUM).

A Variant Under Monitoring (VUM) is a term used to signal to public health authorities that a variant may require prioritized attention, monitoring and investigate if this variant may pose an additional threat to global public health.

- Existing COVID-19 vaccines are expected to remain effective against this variant for symptomatic and severe disease.
- **Symptoms** – Similar to other Covid variants,
  - Fever
  - Severe sore throat (razor-blade-like)
  - Cough
  - Runny nose
  - Tiredness
- **Current Global spread** – NB.1.8.1 is increasing in proportion globally, while other variants like LP.8.1 are declining.
- It has shown higher transmissibility due to **spike protein mutations**.
- **India's situation** – As of May 2025, 1 case of NB.1.8.1 was detected in Tamil Nadu and 4 cases of LF.7 were found in Gujarat.
- However, the dominant variant remains JN.1, comprising 53% of samples.
- A newer recombinant variant, XFG (Originated from two variants LF.7 + LP.81.2), has emerged since May 2025.
- **Surveillance & genome sequencing** – Genomic studies attribute recent surges to evolving Omicron sub-lineages.
- **Severity and hospitalizations** – So far, there is no evidence that NB.1.8.1 causes more severe disease than other circulating variants.

- Hospitalizations have increased in some countries, but not dramatically.
- **Expert view in India** – Indian doctors say COVID-19 is co-circulating with other seasonal infections and can expect spikes and dips, but no massive waves like in 2021.
- **Recommended safety measures**
  - Hand hygiene
  - Avoiding crowded places
  - Wearing masks, especially in vulnerable populations
  - Vaccination boosters as per national advisories
- **Public health measures recommended –** Continued emphasis on personal hygiene, masking in crowded areas, hand washing, and protecting the vulnerable population.
- The government advises vigilance but not panic, as health systems are better prepared.

Reference

The Hindu| Razor Blade Covid Variant

