

S.Africa rejects claim its Covid variant more dangerous than UK strain

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South Africa's health minister has rejected his British counterpart's claim that a new coronavirus variant in the country is more contagious or dangerous than a similar one in spreading the UK.

"At present, there is no evidence that the 501.V2 (variant) is more transmissible than the United Kingdom variant—as suggested by the British Health Secretary," Zwelini Mkhize said in a statement published late Thursday.

"There is also no evidence that (it) causes more severe disease or increased mortality than the UK variant or any variant that has been sequenced around the world".

Announcing restrictions on [travel](#) from South Africa Wednesday, Britain's Matt Hancock had said that the variant there was "highly concerning, because it is yet more transmissible, and it appears to have mutated further" than the similar strain in Britain.

The British minister's words "have created a perception that the variant in SA has been a major factor in the [second wave](#) in UK," Mkhize said.

"This is not correct."

He pointed to evidence that the British strain, which bears a similar mutation to the South African one, appeared as early as September in southeastern county Kent—"approximately a month before the South African variant appears to have developed".

Citing "the widely shared view of the scientific community," Mkhize also argued that "the risks of travel bans may outweigh the benefits".

"Banning travel between UK and SA is an unfortunate decision," he added.

South Africa is the country hit hardest by [coronavirus](#) on the continent, with close to one million infections so far and 26,000 people dead.

Around 14,000 positive cases were detected on each of the past two days, compared with between 8,000 and 10,000 earlier this week.

Mkhize said on Wednesday that new restrictions could be necessary to slow the virus' spread.

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