Twitter Thread by Manolis Dermitzakis

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Having reviewed the information provided by COG-UK, as well as the UK govt report here is my updated assessment regarding the new strain in the UK. 1/n

1. There is a substantial number of mutations relative to the previously prevalent strain, which is impressive, however viruses present such odd patterns. The number of mutations in the spike protein is worrisome primarily for the vaccine effectiveness.

2. It is generally rare that a new strain dominates at times of high prevalence but if on top of this there is rapid growth due to increased people circulation and contacts, something we saw in London, then even rare strains can dominate by chance without any selective advantage.

3. The strain has been around at least since September and has already been found in other countries in Europe and in Australia. However, so far we have not seen a similar expansion in other countries, which would have been expected if the transmissibility was indeed 70% higher.

4. There have been reassurances that the vaccine will not be affected but given the number of mutations, I would be a bit more reserved about this statement, but of course we all hope it is true.

5. No matter what the reasons for this strain to do dominate London, this is a warning that we ned to be aware of such patterns and as I have argued before, we need to vaccinate the population when the virus circulation is low to avoid selecting for a vaccine resistant strain ...

5 (cont). Generally we need to be careful and try to vaccinate rapidly and with low virus circulation to avoid the emergence and selection of a vaccine resistant strain.

6. Overall, we need to be vigilant and study this and other new strains and their dynamic by extensive viral sequence analysis and epidemiological patterns. It could well be that this strain is more transmissible but ...

6 (cont) ... the reaction around it is disproportional to the reaction to many other equally worrisome events. Let’s be calm and vigilant because the pandemic is much more complex than the possible increase in transmissibility of a single strain , and overreaction does not help.

7. Finally, I want to congratulate the COG-UK initiative for generating and providing such deep and detailed data so quickly. I wish all countries had similar programs that would allow for much better control of the pandemic.