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New Covid variant XEC spreading rapidly and 'just getting started'

Experts say this is likely to be the next dominant strain as Covid cases in the UK increase

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A new Covid variant is spreading rapidly and experts say the strain is 'just getting started'. The variant, known as XEC, was first detected in

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Germany and is now spreading across Europe.

Health experts in the USA predict it will rapidly become the dominant strain. Dr Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in California **told the Los Angeles Times** XEC 'is just getting started now around the world and here'.

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XEC is reported to have an advantage over previous strains as it is a recombination of the KS.1.1 and KP.3.3 variants. Dr Elizabeth Hudson, regional chief of infectious diseases for Kaiser Permanente Southern California, said XEC is a variant she has her eye on.

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She said: "We'll really have to watch — because the overall information on it is not super robust now — but I would imagine over the next couple of weeks, particularly if it starts to creep up higher and higher, we will be hearing a little bit more about it."

The virus has been found in 15 countries across three continents after first appearing in Berlin in June. Melbourne data expert Mike Honey has analysed the rapid spread of the strain and said it is 'a likely next challenger to the currently dominant variants'.

Honey said XEC is already outcompeting other variants like the FLiRT, FLuQU and DEFLuQE strains. It has been reported in countries including the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark and Israel.

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The latest figures for the UK show a 4.3% increase in **Covid** cases week on week. There were also 102 Covid deaths in the week to August 30 in England. 1,465 patients were admitted to hospitals with Covid in the same week.

According to the **NHS**, the latest COVID-19 symptoms are

- a high temperature or shivering (chills) – a high temperature means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste
- shortness of breath
- feeling tired or exhausted
- an aching body
- a headache
- a sore throat
- a blocked or runny nose
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick or being sick

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The symptoms are very similar to symptoms of other illnesses, such as colds and flu. Most people feel better within a few weeks, but it can take longer to recover. For some people, it can be a more serious illness and their symptoms can last longer.

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