

Desert Sun.

CALIFORNIA

New COVID-19 variant making its way to California: What to know about XEC variant

Josh Kelly, Anthony Robledo and James Ward USA TODAY NETWORK

Published 11:42 a.m. PT Sept. 21, 2024

As flu season nears, so do new COVID-19 variants.

A newly discovered COVID strain known as XEC continues to spread rapidly across multiple countries, including the United States and California.

First appearing in late June in Berlin, the XEC COVID-19 strain has spread across Europe, North America, and Asia, totaling around 550 samples, according to Australia-based data integration specialist Mike Honey.

The variant has been recorded in 27 countries, including China, Ukraine, Norway, and Poland.

COVID in California

XEC is spreading rapidly worldwide, but there have been only 23 cases in the United States, including three in California.

“We are still in early days, so it could be a dominant strain, or it could fizzle out and die. It’s very difficult to predict. It does have some advantages in the lab over currently circulating strains, predominantly the KP strains,” Chief Dr. Dean Blumberg of Pediatric

Infectious Diseases at UC Davis Health told ABC Sacramento.

Omicron variant KP.3.1.1, also known as deFLuQE, made up over half (52.7%) of COVID-19 cases between Sept. 1 and Sept. 14. However, XEC and a variant known as MV.1 seem poised to become the next dominant strains, scientists say.

"At this juncture, the XEC variant appears to be the most likely one to get legs next," Scripps Research Translational Institute Director Eric Topol wrote on X.

California has seen a slowdown in COVID-19 infections and deaths since late August, the California Department of Public Health reported.

"While COVID-19 levels had increased over the summer to levels comparable to last summer, they are now decreasing as seen in both decreasing SARS-CoV-2 test positivity and detections in wastewater," officials told KCRA 3 Sacramento in a statement.

COVID XEC symptoms

The CDC has not confirmed whether the XEC variant has any unique symptoms. USA TODAY has contacted CDC officials for comment.

The agency continues to outline the primary COVID-19 symptoms, which can appear between two to 14 days after exposure to the virus and can range from mild to severe.

These are some of the symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

The CDC said you should seek medical attention if you have the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds

What is variant MV. 1?

First documented in Maharashtra, India, in late June, COVID-19 variant MV.1 has been recorded in nine countries, including the United States, Honey reported.

It's spread across four continents in countries including Portugal, Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands. In the United States, it's mainly been seen in the northeast, according to Honey.

How can we protect ourselves from XEC and other variants?

The CDC recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older, with some exceptions, receive an updated 2024-25 COVID-19 vaccine to protect against the virus, regardless of whether you have previously been vaccinated or infected.

USA TODAY NETWORK contributed to this report.