

Holidaymakers may need to wear masks as COVID variant spreading rapidly

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The new type of COVID is more common in countries including Spain and India



Covid masks could be a good idea while travelling. A new variant of COVID that makes up more than 30% of cases in the UK and more than 42% of cases in Spain more easily beats immunity, experts say, and you may need to wear a mask. The new subvariant is known as XFG, nicknamed Stratus, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has designated it a “variant under monitoring”.

The new variant, said to cause a hoarse throat, appears to be more easy to catch for people who had had COVID before - meaning Uk holidaymakers going to countries like Spain where it is more prevalent could more easily fall ill. Experts say it may be a good idea to wear masks to stop the spread of the illness.

A variant under monitoring signifies a variant which needs prioritised monitoring as it may pose an additional threat. XFG was one of seven variants under monitoring as of June 25.

Paul Griffin, professor of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology at The University of Queensland, said: " XFG is a recombinant of LF.7 and LP.8.1.2 which means these two subvariants have shared genetic material to come up with the new subvariant."

He added: " While recombination and other spontaneous changes happen often with SARS-CoV-2, it becomes a problem when it creates a subvariant that is changed in such a way that its properties cause more problems for us."

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Professor Griffin said: " Early laboratory studies have suggested a nearly two-fold reduction in how well antibodies block the virus compared to LP.8.1.1."

XFG was first detected on January 27 and has now spread to 38 countries. According to Australian data expert Mike Honey, the countries showing the highest rates of detection of XFG include India at more than 50%, followed by Spain at 42%, and the United Kingdom and United States, where the subvariant makes up more than 30% of cases.

Professor Griffin told [The Conversation](#): "Fortunately, based on the evidence available so far, currently approved COVID vaccines are expected to remain effective against XFG, particularly against symptomatic and severe disease."

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He said: " Although the situation with XFG must continue to be monitored, at present the WHO has assessed the global risk posed by this subvariant as low. The advice for combating COVID remains unchanged, including vaccination as recommended and the early administration of antivirals for those who are eligible.

"Measures to reduce the risk of transmission, particularly wearing masks in crowded indoor settings and focusing on air quality and ventilation, are worth remembering to protect against [coronavirus](#) >[COVID](#) and other viral infections."