



New Covid variant XEC: Reported symptoms and what experts say about 'new wave'



The XEC strain emerged from Omicron subvariants

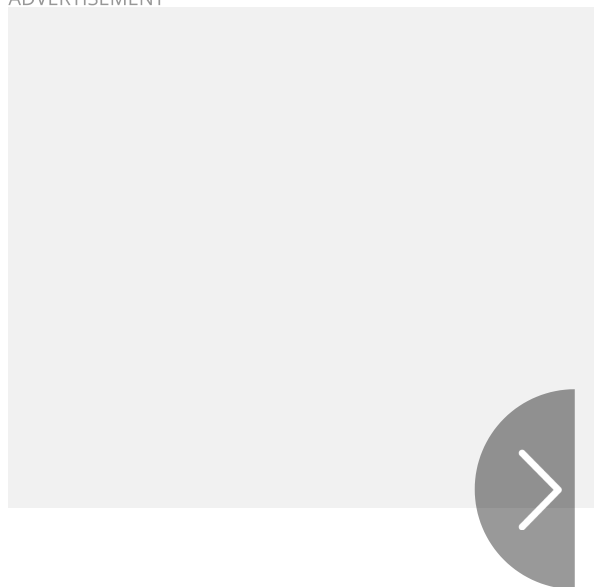


The NHS will be administering booster jabs to some of the most vulnerable in October (Image: No credit)

A new variant of Covid named XEC is expected to become the dominant strain in the coming weeks.

Experts have said XEC, a sublineage of the Omicron variant, will likely cause a new wave of infections over the autumn, taking over from the current dominant variant KP.3.

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The new strain is understood to be spreading in the UK, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands among other countries. Reports from American media suggest the new variant has also now been found in half of US states.

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Dr Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said the new strain is now "taking charge", while data analyst Mike Honey said it is spreading "quite rapidly" through several countries. The XEC variant was first discovered in Berlin in Germany back in June.



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in recent weeks.

Is a new wave coming?

Experts have suggested the XEC strain will soon become the dominant variant. The new strain is understood to have mutations that may make it more transmissible than previous variants.

Dr Topol told the LA Times it would likely take "many weeks, a couple months, before it really takes hold and starts to cause a wave".

In the UK, the latest data suggests Covid cases are creeping up again after falling during the end of July and start of August. The number of infections in the UK was up by 3.6 per cent in the seven days to September 11, with the number of hospital admissions dropping by 6.6 per cent.

The UKHSA has not published data on how many cases of the XEC variant have been confirmed.

What are the symptoms of the new Covid XEC variant?

Experts say the symptoms of the new strain are similar to the main Covid symptoms seen with previous variants.

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shortness of breath and feeling tired or exhausted.

On social media, people who have tested positive in recent weeks **have described feeling achey and 'bruised'**, with some saying they have 'never been this sick'. Feeling weak, struggling to move and suffering from a fever are among the common symptoms that Covid patients have detailed.

Others reported suffering from headaches, as well as a sore and scratchy throat.

Are the vaccines effective against XEC?

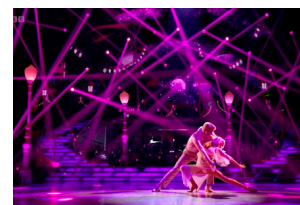
Prof Francois Balloux, Director of the Genetics Institute at University College London, told the **BBC** that the current vaccines available for Covid should still offer good protection.

Dr Elizabeth Hudson, regional chief of infectious diseases for Kaiser Permanente Southern California, said the new variant has emerged from the Omicron variant, meaning vaccines will still be effective. She told the LA Times: "We're not like in a new Greek letter - they're not that much different; it's not like something completely new."

Several different types of vaccine are available and scientists regularly tweak them when new variants become dominant to ensure they remain highly effective.



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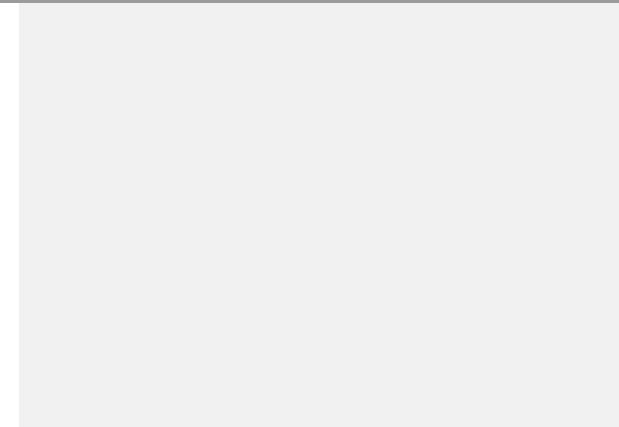


and social care settings.

Should we be worried?

There is no evidence to suggest the XEC strain is more dangerous than others, although experts have said it likely has a 'transmission advantage' over others.

The UKHSA has said it is "normal and expected" for viruses to mutate and change. Health officials are recommending that anyone who is offered a booster vaccine by the NHS takes them up on the offer.



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Dr Gayatri Amirthalingam, UKHSA Deputy Director, said: "It is normal and expected for viruses to genetically change over time. UKHSA continues to monitor all available information relating to emerging Covid variants in the UK and internationally, and to publish our data regularly.

"Vaccination provides the best protection against serious illness from [Covid-19](#), and we urge those who are contacted by the NHS to come forward to receive their autumn vaccine."

People who qualify for a free booster on the NHS include adults aged 65 years and over, people living in a care home for older adults, people who are more vulnerable to Covid due to a health condition and some frontline health staff.

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