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LOCAL

Is the XEC COVID-19 strain in South Jersey? The latest on this virus



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Not unlike some other viruses, COVID-19 has different strains that can infect people throughout various seasons.

Recently, professionals have begun tracking a new strain of the virus call XEC. Some believe it could be the next variant in strong circulation.

Here's everything to know about COVID-19 this season.

Is there a new COVID-19 variant?

Right now, the COVID-19 variant known as XEC is making headlines.

According to Scripps Research Labs' Outbreak.info tool, 633 XEC lineage sequences have been detected worldwide from June 28 to Sept. 10. A total of 14 sequences in the lineage were found in New Jersey between Aug. 2 and Sept. 6.

These sequences make up 1% and 2% of the worldwide and state cumulative.

In the beginning of September, variant KP.3.1.1 surged across the U.S.

"No challenger to its dominance has yet emerged," Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, wrote on X on Sept. 13.

Recently, however, Topol and other experts have turned their attention to the XEC variant.

Mike Honey, a data visualization and data integration specialist based in Melbourne, Australia, graphed the COVID-19 variants Sept. 14.

"Recombinant variant XEC is continuing to spread, and looks a likely next challenger against the now-dominant DeFLuQE variants (KP.3.1.1.*)," Honey wrote on X.

Topol wrote a response to Honey's tracking data, suggesting he agrees that the XEC variant is the one to watch for.

On Sept. 20, Honey posted visualization updates for the U.S. again using data from the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data, aka GISAID.

"XEC is showing a growth advantage of 4.8% per day over the DeFLuQE variants," Honey said, predicting a crossover sometime around late October or November.

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COVID-19 symptoms

As per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, aka CDC, the following are the most recently described symptoms of COVID-19, not pertaining to any one specific variation:

- Fever or chills.
- Cough.

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Sore throat.
- Congestion or runny nose.
- New loss of taste or smell.
- Fatigue.
- Muscle or body aches.
- Headache.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Diarrhea.

The CDC has noted that symptoms can change with new variants and appear differently depending on vaccination status.

What to do if you have COVID-19

This year, the CDC condensed and unified its best practices for combating all respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.

According to the guidelines, those with a respiratory illness or those who suspect they have a respiratory illness should stay away from others.

They should return to their normal activities when their symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours and they've not had a fever without using fever-reducing medication.

Precautions such as hygiene, masking, testing and physical distancing are typically advised for at least five days.

Kaitlyn McCormick writes about trending issues and community news across South Jersey for the Courier-Post, The Daily Journal and the Burlington County Times. If you have a story she should tell, email her at kmccormick@gannett.com. And subscribe to stay up to date on the news you need.