

New Stratus Covid variant detected in UK is circulating in 38 countries

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A new Covid strain called XFG is behind recent surge in cases and hospitalisations across the globe



Covid vaccines are expected to be effective against the new variant(Image: PA)
Health officials in the UK revealed last week that a new dominant Covid variant is circulating across England.

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The latest data by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows a [recent surge in levels of the XFG strain of the virus](#) and its spin-off, XFG.3.

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Nicknamed 'Stratus', the variant made up 10 per cent of cases in England in May. Now, XFG and XFG.3 currently account for around 40 per cent of cases, [making it the dominant strain](#).

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The new variant was declared a "variant under monitoring" by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on June 25, meaning it needs prioritised attention due to characteristics of the variant that may pose an additional threat.

The WHO says [the Stratus variant is "growing rapidly"](#) compared to previous strains of the virus, but where is the new variant circulating?



The new Stratus Covid variant is now the dominant strain in England(Image: Getty Images)

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The earliest sample of XFG was collected on January 27 this year. As of June 22, there were 1,648 cases of the new variant reported across 38 countries. The WHO says the XFG variant now accounts for nearly 23 per cent of all Covid cases.

This was a significant rise from 7.4 per cent recorded four weeks prior and only just below the proportion of the dominant Nimbus variant, known officially as NB.1.8.1, at 24.9 per cent.

According to Mike Honey, a data specialist in Australia, the countries reporting the highest rates of the new variant as of mid-June include India at more than 50 per cent, then Spain at 42 per cent, as well as the UK and the US, where it makes up more than 30 per cent of cases.

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Data by the WHO shows the variant experienced rapid spread in May, with XFG surging from 10.6 per cent of all Covid cases in Europe to 16.7 per cent.

Southeast Asia saw the most significant surge, with the proportion of XFG cases climbing from 17.3 per cent to 68.7 per cent over the month. The region has also seen a recent surge in cases and hospitalisations as a result of the new variant.

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There is some evidence to suggest that mutations on the new Stratus variant could make it evade certain antibodies produced by the body after vaccination or previous Covid infections. This suggests it could be [harder for our bodies' defences to fight off](#) the new strain.

That said, health officials say there is currently no evidence to suggest the variant poses additional health risks compared to previous strains of the virus. The WHO ranks the variant's overall risk as "low".

Dr Alex Allen, Consultant Epidemiologist at UKHSA, said: "Based on the available information so far, there is no evidence to suggest that the XFG and XFG.3 variants cause more severe disease than previous variants, or that the vaccines in current use will be less effective against them."