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The XEC Covid variant, a sublineage of the omicron variant, was first reported in Berlin, Germany, in June and is now spreading "quite rapidly" across Europe, North America and Asia

**NEWS** By [Jamie Brassington](#) Senior reporter

05:30, 21 SEP 2024

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**Self Rapid Test Device for COVID-19 Coronavirus.** (Image: Getty Images)

Experts are raising the alarm over a "more contagious" Covid variant, known as XEC, which is gaining traction across Europe and could become the dominant strain.

Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in La Jolla, expressed his concerns on social media: "At this juncture, the XEC variant appears to be the most likely one to get legs next," he posted on Sunday.

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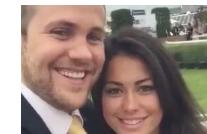
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Back in August, researchers had already predicted that it might only take a few weeks to a couple of months for this variant to spread more rapidly.

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Dr Topol later confirmed the variant's growing influence, saying, "XEC is definitely taking charge". First identified in Berlin, Germany, in June, the XEC variant, a sublineage of the omicron variant, has been spreading "quite rapidly" through Europe, North America, and Asia, reports [Covid](#) data analyst Mike Honey.

Slovenia experienced a significant surge in infections by this variant in August, with over 10 per cent of Covid case samples from the country showing traces of XEC. This variant is a hybrid of two previously discovered omicron subvariants KS. 1.1 and KP.3.3 and is known for its unique mutations.

KS. 1.1 is part of what experts refer to as a FLiRT variant, distinguished by specific mutations - phenylalanine (F) changed to leucine (L), and arginine (R) to threonine (T) - on the spike protein, which the virus uses to enter human cells.

The second omicron subvariant KP. 3.3 falls under the category FLuQE, where the amino acid glutamine (Q) mutates to glutamic acid (E) on the spike protein, enhancing its binding to human cells.

Over 500 samples from 27 countries, including Poland, Norway, Luxembourg, Ukraine, Portugal and China, have been found to contain XEC. As the UK rushes to stockpile Mpox vaccines amid claims that the virus has 'very likely' infiltrated the country, analysts highlight the strong growth of the variant in Denmark, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands.

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With the novel coronavirus continuing to evolve, data suggests that XEC is growing steadily each day, gaining an advantage over previously known subvariants. Its symptoms mirror those of previous Covid variants, including fever, sore throat, cough, loss of sense of smell, loss of appetite, and body aches.

However, as it remains a sub-family of the same omicron lineage, experts maintain that staying up-to-date with vaccines and booster shots should provide sufficient protection against severe illness and hospitalisation.

The US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention also recommends practising good hygiene and taking steps towards cleaner air. Researchers are urging for closer monitoring of the XEC variant to better understand its symptoms.

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