

Just as COVID Levels Start to Dip, a New Variant Emerges

Written by Lisa O'Mary

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Sept. 19, 2024 – A new [COVID-19](#) variant called XEC is on the rise, and it has experts who track variants on alert.

Each time a new variant makes a grand entrance onto tracker lists, health officials take notice because it may mean there's an important change in behavior of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID.

Countries reporting rising detections of XEC include Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, Australian data scientist Mike Honey [posted](#) on the platform X this past week.

XEC’s “characteristic mutations” have been detected in at least 25 states, CBS News [reported](#), with New Jersey, California, and Virginia labs reporting 10 or more cases each. New Jersey detections at least in part stem from the CDC’s testing program for international travelers at Newark Liberty International Airport.

Eric Topol

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· Sep 14, 2024

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Replying to @EricTopol @ShanLuLiu1 and @SystemsVirology

Here's @ShanLuLiu1's recent thread on KP.3.1.1 [x.com/ShanLuLiu1/sta...](#)

Shan-Lu Liu

@ShanLuLiu1

Led by @pei_li30290, we found dramatic nAb evasion conferred by a single DelS31 mutation in the NTD of spike and increased conformational stability. DelS31 variants currently account for >70% of US COVID cases, should DelS31 be included in vaccine design? [biorxiv.org/content/10.110...](#)

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At this juncture, the XEC variant appears to be the most likely one to get legs next. Its current status nicely tracked by @Mike_Honey_'s thread [x.com/Mike_Honey_/st...](#)

Mike Honey

@Mike_Honey_

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

Here are the leading countries reporting XEC. Strong growth in Denmark and Germany (16-17%), also the UK and Netherlands (11-13%).


10:10 AM · Sep 15, 2024

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Still, XEC hasn’t gained enough traction in Europe, the U.S., or any other part of the world for it to be listed as a standalone variant on official watchlists maintained by the [CDC](#), [European Union](#), or [World Health Organization](#).

However, Eric Topol, MD, executive vice president of Scripps Research and editor-at-large for Medscape, WebMD’s sister site for medical professionals, believes XEC is the next variant “to get legs.”

The rate at which a new variant takes the stage doesn’t always predict how severe it will be. Around this time last year, health officials sounded alarms about another Omicron variant called BA.2.86, dubbed Pirola, that ultimately didn’t make major waves.

“[Skip to main content](#)” any specific symptoms associated with XEC or any other co-circulating SARS-CoV-2 lineage,” a CDC spokesperson said in a statement to CBS News.

https://www.webmd.com/covid/news/20240919/just-as-covid-levels-start-to-dip-a-new-variant-emerges

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identify groups of viral variants based on their similarities and on which strains a mutated descendant came from. KP.3.1.1 has been the predominant COVID variant since early August, when it topped the list with 19%, just barely outpacing its parent KP.3. As the nation heads into respiratory illness season, when flu and RSV also typically rise, the CDC said in its [2024-2025 Respiratory Disease Season Outlook](#) publication that officials don’t expect any unusual severe impacts from the three big viruses.

“CDC expects the upcoming fall and winter respiratory disease season will likely have a similar or lower number of combined peak hospitalizations due to COVID-19, influenza, and RSV compared to last season,” the report stated.

COVID levels in the U.S. remain high, according to wastewater detections, which is a retreat from the CDC’s label of “very high” earlier in the summer. About 15% of COVID tests reported to the CDC are positive, and that rate has been trending downward, as have been COVID-related emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

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