

This New ‘Ninja’ COVID Variant Is the Most Dangerous One Yet

The latest subvariant of the novel coronavirus to become dominant in Europe, the United States, and other places is also, in many ways, the worst so far. The **BA.5 subvariant** of the basic Omicron variant appears to be **more contagious than any previous form** of the virus. It’s apparently better at dodging our antibodies, too—meaning it might be more likely to cause breakthrough and repeat infections.

Vaccines and boosters are still the best defense. **There are even Omicron-specific booster jabs in development that, in coming months, could make the best vaccines more effective against BA.5** and its genetic cousins.

Still, BA.5’s ongoing romp across half the planet is a strong reminder that **the COVID pandemic isn’t over**. “We’re not done yet, by any stretch,” Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in California, wrote on his Substack.

High levels of at least partial immunity from vaccines and past infection continue to prevent the worst outcomes—mass hospitalization and death. But globally, raw case numbers are surging, with serious implications for potentially millions of people who face a growing risk of long-term illness.

How COVID Could Screw You Worse With Each Reinfection

Equally worrying, the latest wave of infections is giving the coronavirus the time and space it needs to mutate into even more dangerous variants and subvariants. “The development of variants now is a freight train,” Irwin Redlener, the founding director of Columbia University’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness, told The Daily Beast.

In other words, unstoppable.

BA.5 first turned up in viral samples in South Africa in February. By May it was dominant in Europe and Israel, displacing earlier forms of the basic Omicron variant while also driving an increase in global daily COVID cases from around 477,000 a day in early June to 820,000 a day this week.

In late June, BA.5 became dominant in the United States. Cases haven’t increased yet—the daily average has hovered around 100,000 since May. But that could change in coming weeks as BA.5 continues to outcompete less transmissible subvariants.

Story continues

<https://news.yahoo.com/ninja-covid-variant-most-dangerous-084832058.html>

Meet ‘Centaurus,’ the new ‘stealth Omicron.’ It was just found in the U.S. and may escape immunity more than any other COVID strain

A new Omicron subvariant on the radar of the World Health Organization—one some experts say could be the **most immune-evasive** yet—has been identified in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told *Fortune* on Thursday.

There have been two cases of **BA.2.75, dubbed “Centaurus,”** detected in the U.S., with the first being identified on June 14, a spokesperson for the CDC said. The CDC does not publicly report on emerging variants until they comprise 1% of cases. Thus, current cases of BA.2.75 are being reported on the agency’s data tracker under **BA.2 cases**, which comprised less than 3% of reported U.S. cases last week, according to data released on Tuesday.

Centaurus has recently risen to prominence in India, competing with the BA.5 Omicron subvariant that is sweeping the globe. WHO officials said they were tracking the ultra-new subvariant at a Wednesday press conference and released some information about it via Twitter on Tuesday.

BA.2.75 has been reported in “about 10 other countries” and has not been declared a variant of concern, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's chief scientist, said in a Tuesday tweet. **Transmissibility, severity, and potential for immune evasion are currently unknown**, she added. But some experts are raising potential red flags. Dr. Eric Topol, a professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research and founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said Monday **the new subvariant's mutations “could make immune escape worse than what we're seeing now”** with BA.5 and BA.4, both of which are subvariants known to evade immunity from both vaccination and prior infection.

BA.2.75 was first detected in India in early June. Along with the usual Omicron mutations, it has as many as nine additional changes, none of which are concerning individually.

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