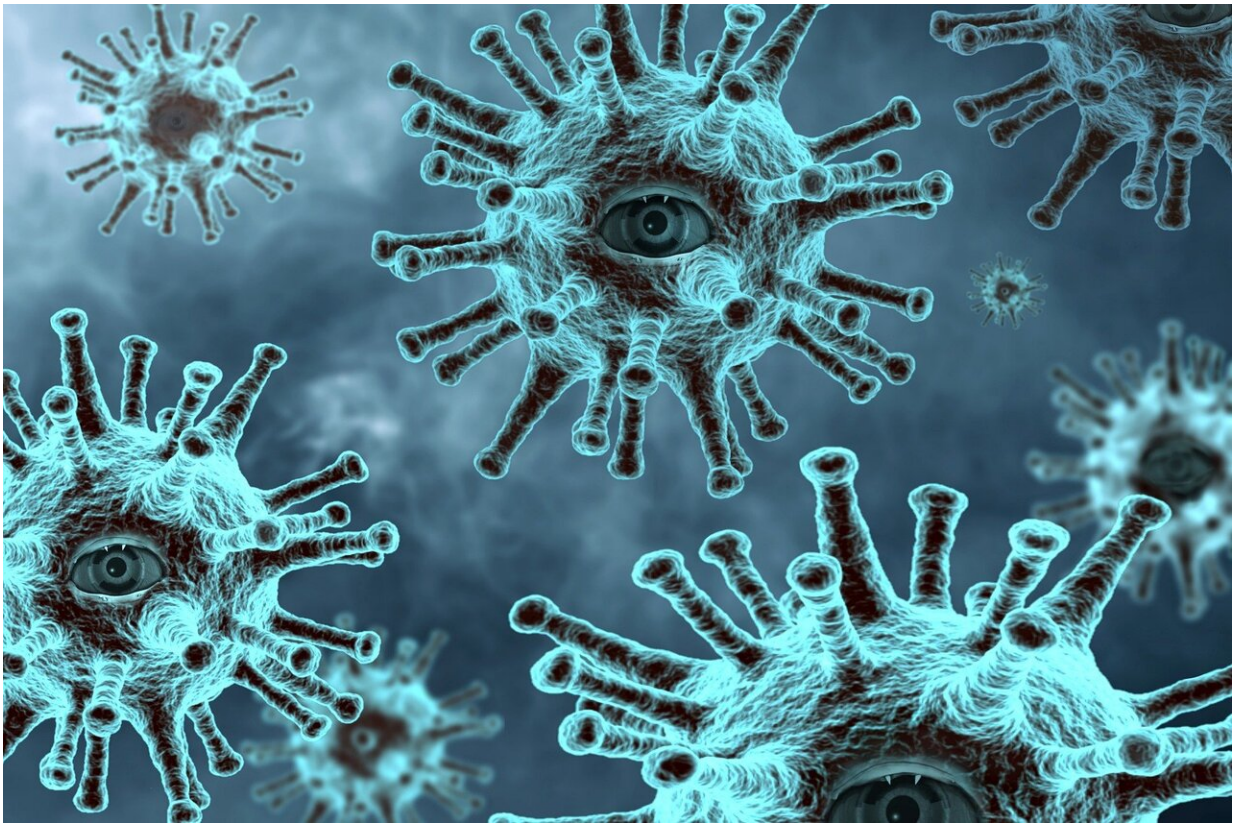


England to surge testing after detecting 11 S.African variant cases

February 2 2021



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Health officials said Monday they will increase testing in eight areas across England where nearly a dozen South African COVID-19 variant cases have been identified in the last week.

The 11 cases, detected in genomic sequencing carried out on random samples of positive coronavirus results, cannot be traced back to international travel, prompting concerns of localised transmission.

The move in the areas—home to around 80,000 people and including parts of London and the southeast, as well as the West Midlands, eastern and northwest England—will see mobile and door-to-door testing capacity rolled out.

In a break with usual procedures, even those not showing virus symptoms can get tested in the affected places.

"It is vital that we do all we can to stop transmission of this variant and I strongly urge everyone in these areas to get tested, whether you have symptoms or not," Health Secretary Matt Hancock said in a statement.

"We continue to closely monitor new variants, here and around the world, and in addition to our already extensive testing service, we are making surge testing capacity available to affected areas."

The highly transmissible [coronavirus](#) variant first identified in South Africa is spreading rapidly around the world, and was last week detected for the first time in the already hard-hit United States.

Scientists are worried about the mutation because it seems able to elude some of the effects of current vaccines and synthetic antibody treatments, though Moderna and Pfizer said their shots still work against the variant.

Britain has so far detected 105 cases of the strain since it emerged late last year.

It imposed a travel ban on flights and arrivals from South Africa in late

December, and has beefed up quarantine and other measures for all travellers coming to the UK.

Officials had hoped the moves would prevent the variant being imported, but the 11 new cases without travel links have heightened concerns that the strategy may have failed.

However, in six of the eight places seeing new cases of the South African variant in the last week, the infections were found in just single people rather than clusters.

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