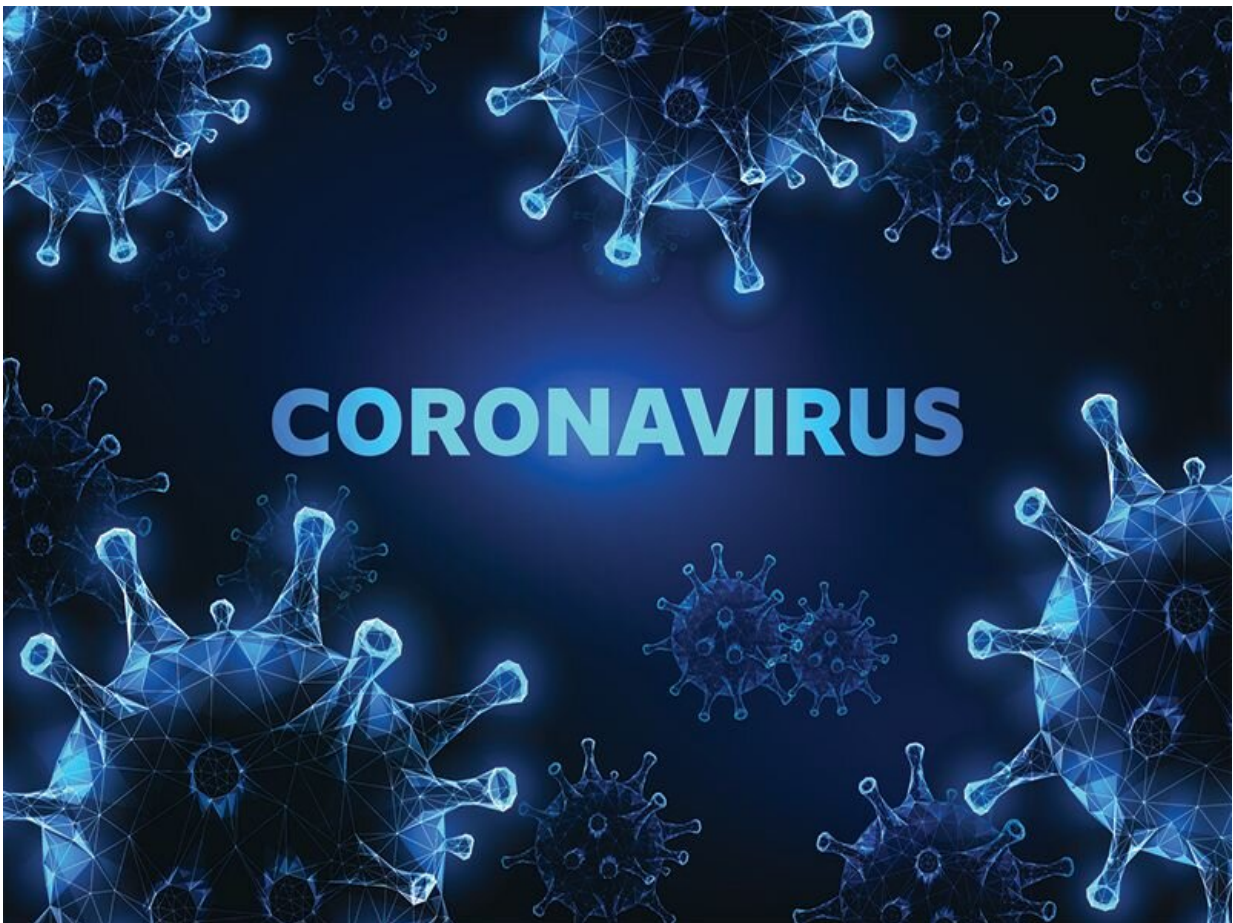


Southern california is origin of new COVID-19 variant

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(HealthDay)—A new variant of COVID-19 found in Southern

California is coursing across the United States and around the world, a new study finds.

The variant—called CAL.20C—was first found in July in Los Angeles County. It reappeared in Southern California in October, then spread in November and December, with a regional surge in coronavirus cases.

The variant now makes up nearly half of COVID-19 cases in Southern California.

It's not clear whether CAL.20C might be more lethal than current coronavirus variants, or whether it might resist current vaccines. New research is underway at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles to help answer those questions.

"New variants do not always affect the behavior of a virus in the body," said study co-author Dr. Eric Vail, an assistant professor of pathology at the Cedars-Sinai Center for Bioinformatics and Functional Genomics.

The new variant has spread to 19 states and the District of Columbia, as well six other countries, according to the report, published Feb. 11 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

As of Jan. 22, the variant had been found in Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Washington, D.C. It was also found in Australia, Denmark, Israel, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom, according to the new study.

Study co-author Jasmine Plummer said people traveling from Southern California are carrying CAL.20C to other places. Plummer is a research scientist at the Cedars-Sinai Center for Bioinformatics and Functional

Genomics in Los Angeles.

"CAL.20C is moving, and we think it is Californians who are moving it," Plummer said in center news release.

Vail said researchers are keenly interested in CAL.20C, because it involves the so-called spike protein, which enables the SARS-CoV-2 virus to invade and infect normal cells.

More information: For more on COVID-19, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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