

# Two new Omicron subvariants fueling COVID infections in New York state

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Rising coronavirus infections in New York state appear to be driven by

two new versions of the Omicron [BA.2 variant](#), and may explain why the state has been the national coronavirus hot spot in recent weeks, state health officials said Wednesday.

The two subvariants—called BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1—accounted for more than 70% of new cases in March, and now account for more than 90%, the New York State Department of Health said in a [statement](#). One in five coronavirus cases in the Finger Lakes region are caused by the two subvariants.

"We are alerting the public to two Omicron subvariants, newly emerged and rapidly spreading in upstate New York, so New Yorkers can act swiftly," State Health Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett said in the statement. "While these subvariants are new, the tools to combat them are not. These tools will work if we each use them: get fully vaccinated and boosted, [test](#) following exposure, symptoms or travel, consider wearing a [mask](#) in public indoor spaces, and consult with your [health care provider](#) about treatment if you test positive."

The two new viruses appear to be about 25% more contagious than BA.2, which was more contagious than any previous [variant](#) of the coronavirus. One of the subvariants has a mutation that has been shown to help evade the body's immune defenses, [health officials](#) said.

Still, it's unclear whether the new versions of Omicron cause more [severe illness](#) than previous variants, health officials said.

The two subvariants have already been detected in more than 30 U.S. states and over 40 other countries, said Kirsten St. George, a virologist for New York State.

"It's just a reminder that we're not out of the woods with regard to this virus, and people should continue to take precautions and to get fully

vaccinated if they haven't completed their course," St. George told *The New York Times*.

**More information:** Visit the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention for more on [Omicron](#).

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