

COVID cases up by more than 30% in Britain last week

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People wear face masks as they walk, in Regent Street, in London, Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021. The number of new coronavirus cases across Britain has surged by more than 30% in the last week, with cases largely driven by the super infectious omicron variants. Data released by Britain's Office for National Statistics on Friday, July 1, 2022 showed that more than 3 million people in the U.K. had COVID-19 last week, although there has not been an equivalent spike in hospitalizations. Credit: AP Photo/Alberto Pezzali, File

The number of new coronavirus cases across Britain has surged by more than 30% in the last week, new data showed Friday, with cases largely driven by the super infectious omicron variants.

Data released by Britain's Office for National Statistics showed that more than 3 million people in the U.K. had COVID-19 last week, although there has not been an equivalent spike in hospitalizations. The number of COVID-19 deaths also fell slightly in the last week.

"COVID-19 has not gone away," said Dr. Mary Ramsay, of the Health Security Agency. "It is also sensible to wear a face covering in crowded, enclosed spaces," she said. Britain dropped nearly all its coronavirus measures, including mask-wearing and social distancing months ago and masks are rarely seen on public transport.

The latest jump in coronavirus cases comes after an earlier increase of about 40% last month, following the large street parties, concerts and festivities held to mark the platinum jubilee celebrations marking 70 years of Queen Elizabeth II's reign.

British officials said the latest wave of COVID-19 infections were likely caused by omicron subvariants BA.4. and BA.5. Omicron has tended to cause a milder disease than previous variants like alpha or delta, but scientists warn its ability to evade the immune system means that people may be more susceptible to being [reinfected](#), including after vaccination.

"The constant bombardment of waves we are seeing does cause clinical impact that is not to be underestimated," said Dr. Stephen Griffin, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Leeds, explaining that any infection can lead to long COVID.

Despite widespread immunization across Britain, the protection from vaccines is likely fading and omicron and its subvariants have evolved to

become more infectious. Britain's Health Security Agency said they were seeing more outbreaks in care homes for older people and a rise in admissions to intensive care units of people over 65.

Dr. Jonathan Van-Tam, a former deputy chief medical officer for the U.K., told the BBC that COVID-19 is now "much, much, much closer to seasonal flu" than when it first emerged. Still, he said experts should be vigilant for any signs the virus was causing more severe illness.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute also reported a similar rise in the coronavirus, with cases increasing especially among older people, children and teenagers. France has seen a jump in the COVID-19 hospitalization rate and officials recently recommended that people begin wearing masks again on public transport.

Globally, the World Health Organization said [this week](#) that COVID-19 is increasing in more than 100 countries worldwide. The U.N. health agency warned that relaxed testing and surveillance measures mean it may be more difficult to catch emerging variants before they spread more widely.

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