

# Does the COVID vaccine protect against BA.5 variant? A doctor answers

July 15 2022, by Hanh Truong

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The new BA.5 is one of the "worst" subvariants circulating the country, infecting even those who have immunity from previous infections and vaccines.

Dr. Eric Topol, founder and director of Scripps Research Translational Institute, called the new subvariant "the worst version of the virus that we've seen" in an online post in June. He cited its advanced ability to escape immunity and high transmission, in contrast to the original omicron and its family variants, including BA.2 and BA.4.

California's seven-day test positivity rate is at 16.1%, as of July 12, an increase from 4.3% on May 11, according to the state's public health dashboard. Reported COVID case numbers have remained steady with 36.1 new cases per 100,000, but hospitalizations with confirmed cases have jumped from the last week—at more than 4,000.

## **Will current vaccines protect me from BA.5?**

Preventing [infection](#) from BA.5 with vaccines is probably limited, if it provides any protection at all, said Dr. Stuart Cohen, infectious disease professor and chief of UC Davis Health's division of infectious diseases.

According to a UC Davis Health news release, BA.5 is a "whole different animal." It's the most easily transmissible variant and can evade previous immunity from both infections and vaccinations.

Cohen explained that the changes with the COVID-19 virus are in the areas that the [immune response](#) from the vaccines target. As the virus continues to mutate, it becomes different from what the [vaccine](#) was designed against, he said.

But while current COVID vaccines might not prevent infection, Cohen said it can minimize the amount of damage that the virus causes. He added that those who are experiencing severe infection are unvaccinated people.

## Symptoms of BA.5

According to UC Davis, symptoms of BA.5 are similar to previous COVID infections. Signs include "fever, [runny nose](#), coughing, [sore throat](#), headaches, muscle pain and fatigue."

If you notice you have COVID-related symptoms, you should get tested. The [federal government](#) is providing free at-home COVID tests. You can order them online.

## Should I get another booster?

If you've already had the two-series COVID shot and booster—three shots total—you don't need another booster, unless you are older and have underlying [medical conditions](#), Cohen said.

In March, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended immunocompromised people and those over 50 years old who had their first booster dose at least four months ago to get another mRNA booster.

Cohen said he's gotten the four shots, but the second booster isn't necessary for everyone. He advised that those who can wait look ahead to the fall, when a new vaccine may become available.

To prevent infection from BA.5, consider re-employing safety measures. Cohen said the practices from the beginning of the pandemic, including masking, not gathering in large groups and social distancing, likely still serve a significant purpose in preventing infection.

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