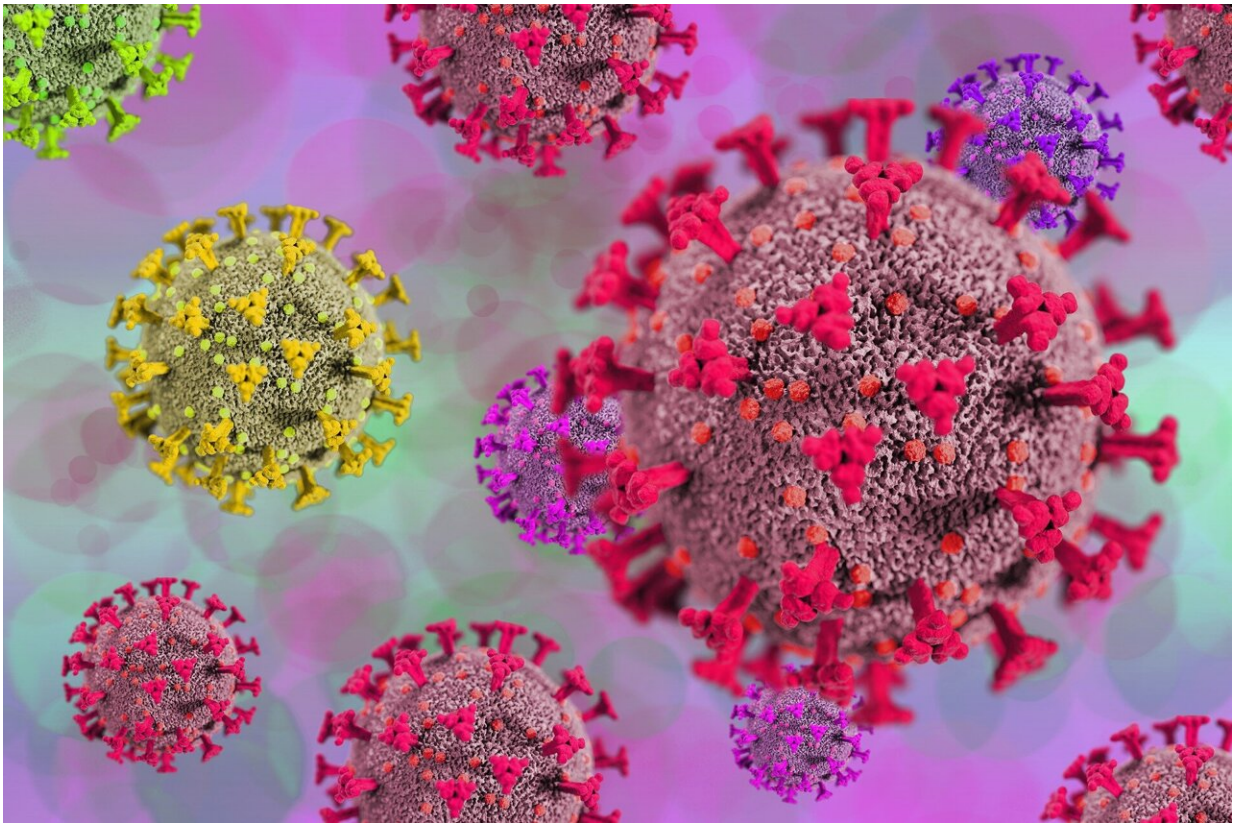


New variant increases the risk of 'longer COVID,' warns expert

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Now it's "longer COVID." New figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show 30% of long COVID sufferers have had symptoms for more than two years. New cases of long COVID are also

increasing just as the new "Kraken" XBB1.5 subvariant looks set to sweep the U.K.

The latest government bulletin paints a grim picture for long COVID sufferers. It shows 30% of people with long COVID symptoms have had them for over two years. New cases of long COVID are also rising and these could be fueled by the arrival of the super-transmissible COVID "Kraken" XBB1.5 subvariant, warns a leading testing expert.

Dr. Quinton Fivelman Ph.D., chief scientific officer at London Medical Laboratory, says, "The latest ONS report on the prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus infection makes stark reading: 2.1 million Brits are now suffering from long COVID, and 30% of those have now been battling these symptoms for over two years. We are looking at a chronic condition that we could term 'longer COVID.'

"Long COVID continues to ruin lives. 1.6 million people in the U.K. say it adversely impacts on their day-to-day activities. Fatigue continues to be the most common self-reported [symptom](#) of long COVID (71%), followed by difficulty concentrating (49%), shortness of breath (47%) and muscle ache (46%).

"The growing number of people suffering from 'longer COVID' shouldn't mask the fact that many brand-new cases of long COVID are still being reported. It's quite wrong to believe long COVID was mainly caused by earlier variants of the virus and that new cases of the supposedly 'milder' omicron variants don't trigger long COVID symptoms. In fact, 37% of all current cases have developed during this latest omicron phase of the pandemic. In all, 9% of current long COVID sufferers first had (or suspected they had) COVID-19 less than 12 weeks previously.

"It's not hard to conclude that the higher the number of new COVID

cases, the greater the likelihood of increased long COVID cases. With that in mind, we should be concerned about the number of people contracting the latest COVID XBB1.5 subvariant, known in the U.S. as 'Kraken.' It is named after the sea monster from Scandinavian folklore and has not been given a Greek letter, as it is a subvariant.

"Epidemiologists believe XBB1.5 is the result of two different strains of BA2 omicron subvariants merging together—it's what is termed a 'recombinant subvariant.' It's most likely caused by a person catching two different strains of COVID at the same time. It was first detected in New York in November and is now spreading rapidly both in the U.S. and the U.K.

"The problem is that this latest version, while not appearing to have any more harmful initial symptoms than previous subvariants, does have a growth advantage, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In other words, it seems to be more easily transmissible. In fact, the U.S. epidemiologist Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding says that XBB1.5 is both more immune evasive and better at infecting than previous subvariants. The issue could be that the greater the number of new COVID cases, the greater the chance of new long COVID symptoms.

"One final concern is that new COVID cases emanating from China may prove resistant to current vaccines. Last week, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) called for expedited sequencing. That involves rapid testing to establish which COVID [variant](#) is present for new arrivals from China who are then hospitalized with COVID. The UKHSA warns: 'The lack of timely and adequate genomic data from China limits our understanding of China's variant profile, making it difficult to categorically assess the public health risk to the U.K.'

"However, if new sub-lineages or variants emerged that could evade the [immune response](#) of highly vaccinated individuals then they could pose a

threat if they were successful enough to outcompete other variants and spread internationally."

The best way to guard against catching new COVID variants and developing long COVID symptoms is by being fully vaccinated.

Provided by London Medical Laboratory

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