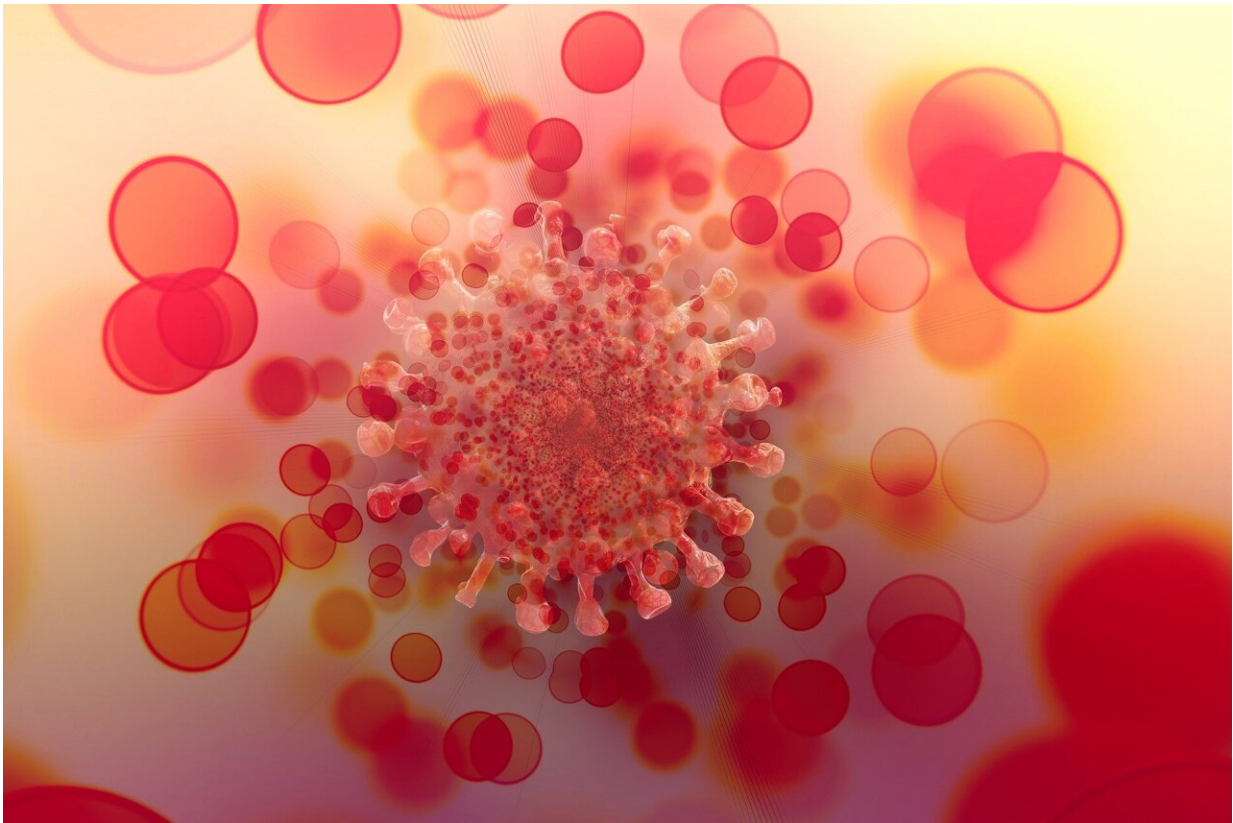


Growing concerns about newly emerging 'Pirola' BA.2.86, a SARS-CoV-2 subvariant

August 30 2023, by Bob Yirka



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Scientists around the world are growing more concerned about a newly emerging subvariant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus—named BA.2.86 and referred to generically as "Pirola"—according to Mun-Keat Loo,

international features editor for the medical journal *BMJ*.

In his paper published on the site, Loo says that research conducted thus far on the variant suggests it has such a high number of mutations that it could neutralize the immune systems of people who have been infected with other earlier variants of the virus.

In his paper, Loo also notes that some in the field, such as Francois Balloux, with University College London's Genetics Institute, are calling the new strain the most striking SARS-CoV-2 subvariant to develop since omicron.

Media outlets have reported that genetic sequencing of the new strain has been conducted on blood samples of infected people in the U.S., the U.K., Israel and Denmark. And the circumstances surrounding such infections suggest that they were not connected, which means that the variant has become established in those countries and likely many others.

Loo notes that Balloux also pointed out that the [genetic diversity](#) found in the new variant suggests it has been circulating for several months. He notes also that all of its 30-plus mutations have been found in its spike protein, which is the part used to gain entry and infect other cells. Such mutations, he adds, could allow for neutralizing antibodies.

Research thus far has shown that BA.2.86 arose from the [omicron](#) variant and that it has 34 more [mutations](#) than its closest relative. Loo also spoke with Kristian Andersen, with the Scripps Research Institute, who told him that she and her team have found that the new variant has most if not all the features that suggest it could become a dominant strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Notably, the variant is still so new that no one really knows how virulent it is as it continues to mutate. No one knows yet whether its symptoms

will be worse than prior variants, either—or how effective current vaccines may be against it. In any case, Loo suggests that governments around the world start to pay better attention to the new variant and perhaps, at the very least, to start monitoring infection numbers, hospitalizations, and deaths again.

More information: Mun-Keat Looi, Covid-19: Scientists sound alarm over new BA.2.86 "Pirola" variant, *BMJ* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.p1964](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p1964)

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