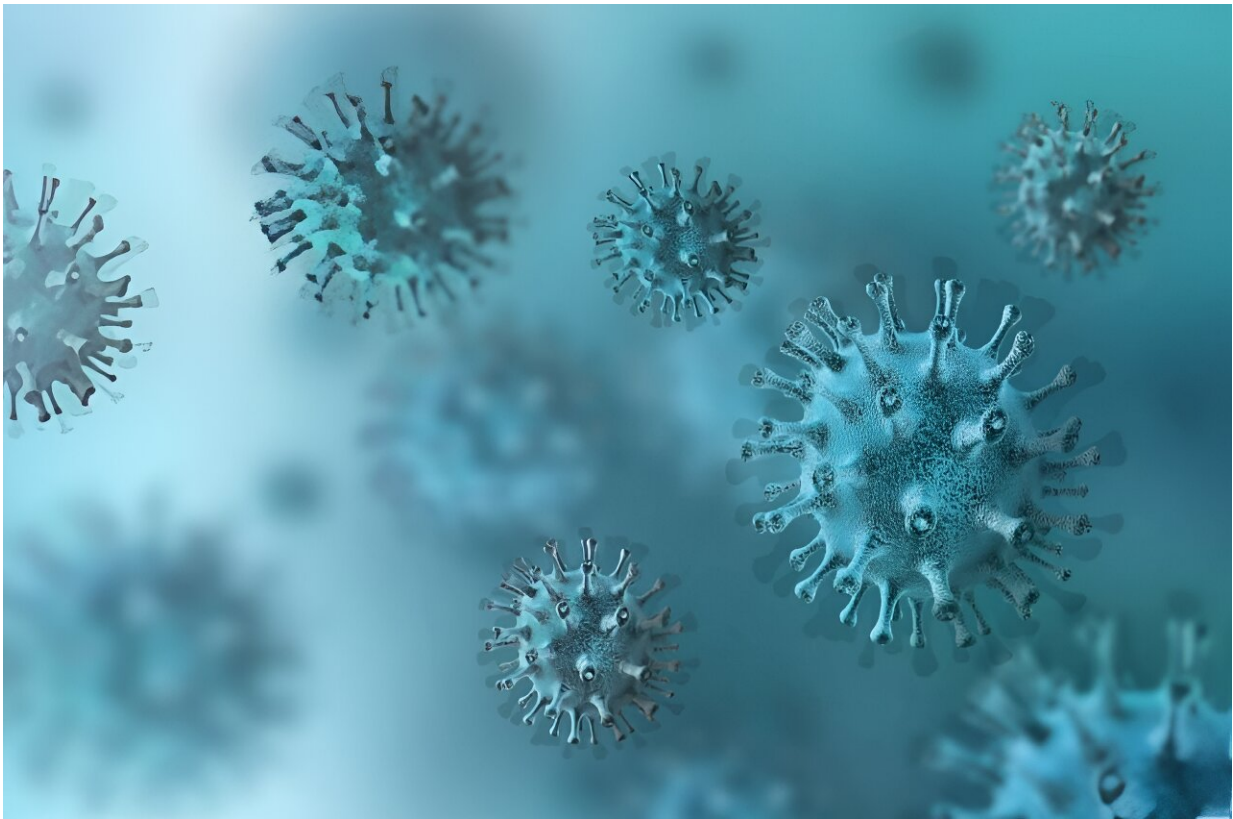


JN.1 variant now behind nearly half of US COVID cases

December 29 2023, by Robin Foster



As Americans travel far and wide to see family and friends this holiday season, a new COVID variant named JN.1 has become dominant across the country.

A descendant of the [variant](#) BA.2.86, JN.1 now accounts for 44 percent of COVID cases, up from roughly 7 percent in late November, the latest [data](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows.

"Variants take some time to get going," Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, told the *New York Times*. "Then they speed up, they spread widely, and just when they're doing that, after several months, a new variant crops up."

The [holiday season](#) is likely fueling the rise of JN.1, he added.

"When people are gathered inside close to each other, having parties and traveling and the like, those are the kind of circumstances where all respiratory viruses, including JN.1, have opportunities to spread," Schaffner said.

Still, the speed at which the JN.1 variant has spread this month suggests it may spread more easily and be better at evading people's immune systems than other circulating variants, according to a recent [CDC report](#).

"It is too early to know whether or to what extent JN.1 will cause an increase in infections or hospitalizations," the CDC said in its report.

Luckily, JN.1 does not seem to be causing more [severe illness](#) yet, Schaffner noted.

The other good news? The updated COVID vaccines that were [released in September](#) produce antibodies that work against JN.1, which is distantly related to the XBB.1.5 variant the tweaked vaccines target.

"For those who were recently infected or boosted, the cross-protection

against JN.1 should be decent, based on our laboratory studies," [Dr. David Ho](#), a virologist at Columbia University in New York City, told the *Times*.

Ho led [research](#) published on the preprint server bioRxiv in early December that showed the latest COVID vaccines produce a strong antibody response to JN.1.

Despite the fact that JN.1 may not cause more [severe disease](#) than other variants, hospitalizations have started creeping up recently, the *Times* reported.

For the week of Dec. 10, there were just under 26,000 COVID-linked hospitalizations, a 10 percent increase from about 23,000 hospitalizations the week before. However, those numbers are still far lower than they were during during the peak of the tripledemic last winter, when COVID, flu and R.S.V. cases all surged simultaneously.

JN.1 will most likely remain the dominant COVID variant through spring, Schaffner said.

How can you protect yourself?

Experts said everyone should consider getting vaccinated, especially those who are over 65, are immunocompromised, have [health conditions](#) that put them at higher risk of severe illness or are visiting loved ones who may be vulnerable.

"Give yourself a New Year's present by getting this vaccine if you haven't done it yet," Schaffner said.

More information: Visit the CDC for more on [COVID](#).

Copyright © 2023 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: JN.1 variant now behind nearly half of US COVID cases (2023, December 29)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-jn1-variant-covid-cases.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.