

EU drug watchdog urges COVID-19 vaccine update

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The EU's drug watchdog urged Tuesday that anti-COVID jabs be updated before another round of vaccinations to counter a new variant of the virus, which is still claiming thousands of lives.

The most widely circulating COVID variant worldwide is now JN.1, having overtaken the XBB family that is the target of the most recent vaccines, the European Medicines Agency said.

The Amsterdam-based watchdog's emergency task force said it has "recommended updating COVID-19 vaccines to target the new variant JN.1 for the 2024-2025 vaccination campaign" the EMA said.

Some 4,500 COVID deaths were reported in March, the World Health Organization said in its latest epidemiological update, with some 275,000 new cases reported globally.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned in January that although COVID-19 "was no longer a global health emergency, the virus is still circulating, changing, and killing."

The EMA urged vaccine-makers with marketing authorization to contact the agency.

"Companies currently developing new COVID-19 vaccines not targeting JN.1 are also encouraged to contact EMA to discuss strategies for changing the composition of their vaccines," the EMA said.

Tedros declared an end to COVID-19 as an international public health emergency in May 2023, more than three years on from when the virus was first detected in Wuhan, China, in late 2019.

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