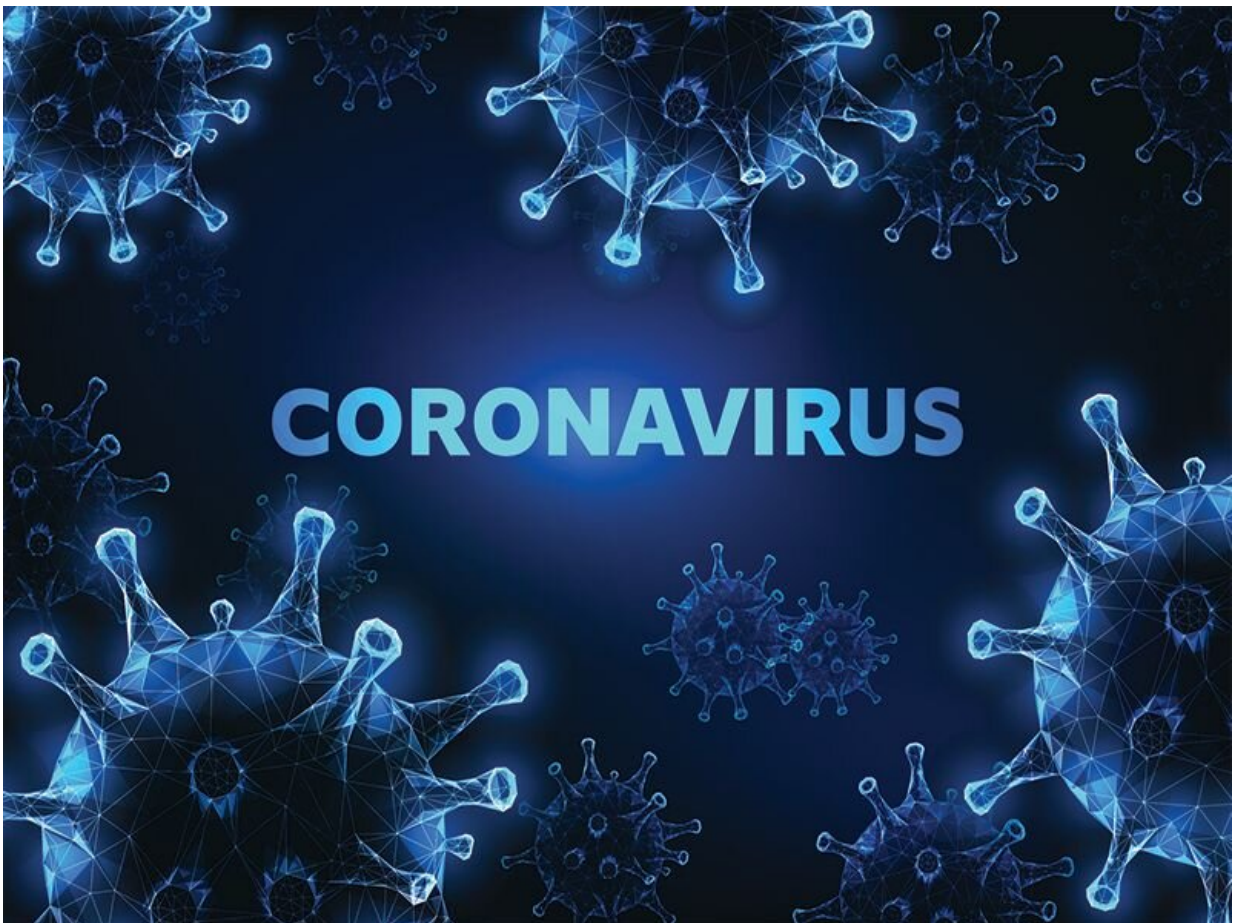


Precautions even more important with new coronavirus variant: experts

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A new and more infectious variant of the COVID-19 virus has shown up

in separate cases in Colorado and California, weeks after it first emerged in the United Kingdom.

Doctors on the pandemic's front line say people shouldn't panic, but should definitely adhere even more closely to proven infection control measures, like mask wearing and social distancing.

"While the new strain is more transmissible—up to 70% by a recent analysis—the mutation itself has not previously been thought to be more virulent [able to cause harm] than the current strains that have been circulating in the U.S. and abroad," said Dr. Robert Glatter. He's an emergency medicine physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

There is no evidence that the new variant makes people any sicker or increases the overall risk of death from COVID-19, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It also appears that COVID-19 vaccines should protect against it.

U.K. researchers first detected the new variant in September, and it now is highly prevalent in London and southeast England, the CDC says.

About 15% of people exposed to someone carrying the variant wind up infected, compared with a 10% infection rate associated with the standard COVID-19 [coronavirus](#), according to a report by British public health officials.

But data from the United Kingdom has shown that the new variant doesn't appear to have any resistance against the COVID-19 vaccines being distributed across America, Glatter said.

"The new strain has not yet been shown to be more resistant to the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccines that have recently been rolled out, along with other vaccine candidates in Phase 3 trials and yet

to be granted emergency use authorization," Glatter said.

These mRNA vaccines are engineered to induce the [immune system](#) to produce antibodies to multiple areas of the spike protein, he said. The spike protein, found on the outer surface of the virus, is the primary way the virus attaches to cells in the body, he explained.

Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health in Providence, R.I., agreed with Glatter.

"There's no evidence so far—and we're still studying it—that it's any deadlier," Jha told *ABC News*. "And I'm not at all worried it's going to escape the [vaccine](#)."

However, the fact that a new variant has reared its head shows that researchers will need to maintain a constant watch, to make sure the coronavirus doesn't eventually mutate away from the protection afforded by these vaccines, Glatter added.

"We can't be complacent and must focus our attention on critical mutations by engaging in active genomic surveillance as the pandemic continues to rage throughout the U.S. and globally," Glatter said. "This may ultimately require us to adjust the makeup of current vaccines over the next several years."

The presence of this new variant provides additional impetus to protect yourself and those around you against the spread of the coronavirus, Glatter said.

"With the reality of a variant strain now circulating globally, the importance of adherence to tried-and-true measures of mitigation—physical distancing, wearing a mask and hand hygiene—are now more important than ever to reduce transmission," he said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [new COVID-19 variants](#).

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