# Rise of KP.2 Variant Sparks Concerns Over Vaccine Efficacy and Future Prevalence



The KP.2 variant of the coronavirus, an offshoot of the previously dominant JN.1 variant, is showing a significant rise in prevalence across the United States. Initially accounting for only 1% of COVID-19 cases in mid-March, KP.2's share has since escalated to over 25%. Despite its close relation to JN.1, KP.2 exhibits slight modifications in its spike protein which may enhance its ability to evade immune responses and increase its infectivity, according to preliminary lab studies by Dr. David Ho from Columbia University.

Health experts, including Dr. Marc Sala of the Northwestern Medicine Comprehensive COVID-19 Center, do not foresee imminent large-scale changes in COVID-19 infection rates but suggest KP.2 could become the prevalent strain. Analysis is somewhat hampered by the CDC's cessation of detailed tracking of COVID case counts. However, indications from other sources such as wastewater analysis and hospital data point to relatively low circulation levels of the virus nationally, with a declined trend observed from early March to late April.

There are concerns surrounding vaccine efficacy against KP.2. The current vaccines are primarily designed to target variant XBB.1.5, significantly different from JN.1 and its derivatives like KP.2. Preliminary research from Japan indicates that KP.2 may infect individuals who are vaccinated with the latest COVID shots, although these findings await peer review.

Despite potential challenges with vaccine efficacy, existing vaccinations and prior infections could still offer protection, particularly against severe disease. The CDC maintains that those at higher risk such as elderly individuals, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised should consider the updated vaccines for better protection.

As for clinical manifestations, KP.2 is believed to cause symptoms similar to other COVID-19 variants, including respiratory and gastrointestinal symptoms. There remains the possibility of developing long COVID from reinfections, although experts are still investigating the extent of this risk as the virus evolves.