# New Covid-19 Variant KP.2 Dominates in the United States



**New Covid-19 Variant Becomes Dominant in the United States**

According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a new Covid-19 variant, KP.2, has overtaken JN.1 to become the dominant strain in the United States. As of May 11, KP.2 accounts for over a quarter of all Covid-19 cases in the country, nearly doubling the prevalence of JN.1. Another related variant, KP.1.1, constitutes approximately 7% of cases.

Both KP.2 and KP.1.1 are part of the FLiRT variants, linked back to the broader Omicron lineage responsible for the winter surge in cases. These variants have accumulated mutations that enhance transmissibility and help evade immune defenses.

Dr. Andy Pekosz of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health notes that the mutations allow the virus to escape from immunity or bind more strongly to cells. Despite the rise of these variants, current Covid-19 levels in the U.S. are notably low.

Wastewater surveillance and hospitalization rates indicate very low and decreasing viral activity. Dr. William Schaffner of Vanderbilt University adds that while the FLiRT variants are highly transmissible, they do not appear to cause more severe disease compared to other Omicron subvariants.

The U.S. has scaled back Covid-19 surveillance following the end of the public health emergency, but some networks, including one run by the CDC, continue to track trends. The hospitalization rates have decreased significantly, from nearly 8 per 100,000 people at the start of the year to about 1 per 100,000 by the end of April.

Experts predict a slight uptick in cases this summer due to these new variants but emphasize that the primary concern lies in the fall, when conditions are more favorable for virus transmission. Research published in JAMA indicates that despite lower hospitalization rates this winter, Covid-19 remains deadlier than the flu, with a higher mortality rate among hospitalized patients.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's vaccine advisory committee is set to meet in June to decide on the version of the Covid-19 vaccine for the fall season, aiming to provide updated recommendations based on the latest data. For now, experts like Dr. Schaffner maintain that the situation is currently stable and at a significantly improved level compared to previous phases of the pandemic.