# New covid variants Stratus and Nimbus show increased transmissibility but no rise in severity



Two new Covid-19 variants, known as XFG or Stratus, and NB.1.8.1 or Nimbus, are currently circulating in the UK. According to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), these variants do not seem to cause more severe illness than previous strains, although recent genetic changes may have increased their transmissibility. Stratus has become the dominant strain in England, accounting for about 30% of cases, while Nimbus represents roughly a quarter of monitored infections. The UKHSA has categorised Stratus as a "variant under monitoring" due to its rising prevalence.

Experts note that typical Covid symptoms caused by these variants remain consistent with earlier strains. Common signs include cough, fever, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and loss of taste or smell. Unique to Stratus, a hoarse voice has been highlighted as a distinctive symptom, whereas Nimbus has been linked to a particularly painful sore throat, often described as a "razor-blade" sensation. Additional symptoms for Nimbus may include sneezing, runny nose, congestion, and gastrointestinal issues such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhoea.

Despite the mild nature of most infections, the risk of serious illness remains concentrated among older adults—particularly those aged 75 and over—and individuals with underlying health conditions such as chronic kidney disease, diabetes, or compromised immune systems. Warning signs that should prompt urgent medical advice include confusion, persistent high fever, breathlessness, and markedly reduced oxygen levels. For older patients, symptoms that persist or worsen over several days, including severe fatigue or loss of appetite, also require vigilance.

The decline in vaccine uptake among older populations is a significant concern for public health experts. Uptake of Covid vaccines has been falling year by year, with recent figures showing about 60% coverage among those over 75, which falls short of recommended levels. There is a persistent misconception that current vaccines are ineffective against emerging variants; however, scientific evidence firmly supports that vaccines continue to provide protection against severe disease caused by the existing strains, including Stratus and Nimbus. Public health professionals strongly recommend that older adults receive Covid vaccinations twice annually, typically in spring and autumn, which are provided free on the NHS.

Laboratory research sheds light on the differences between these variants. Nimbus exhibits a strong affinity for the ACE2 receptor in human cells, which facilitates its infectivity. Meanwhile, Stratus possesses mutations that enhance its ability to evade antibodies, potentially making it more contagious. Nonetheless, neither variant has led to a significant surge in hospitalisations or more severe clinical outcomes, according to current surveillance data. Amid these developments, health authorities continue to urge caution—encouraging individuals to avoid contact with vulnerable people when possible and to self-isolate if symptomatic.

In summary, while the Stratus and Nimbus Covid variants have increased transmissibility and distinctive symptomatic profiles, they do not currently pose a greater threat of severe illness compared to previous variants. Continued vaccination efforts, especially targeting older and vulnerable groups, remain pivotal in mitigating the impact of these evolving strains and enabling society to live as normally as possible.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2116298/new-covid-variants-symptoms), [[2]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/health/stratus-covid-variant-symptoms-signs-vaccine-uk-b2783498.html), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-30/nimbus-and-stratus-should-i-be-worried-about-the-new-covid-variants), [[4]](https://www.natureetscience.com/news/other/all-about-stratus-new-covid-variant-on-the-rise-in-uk-could-be-the-most-vaccine-resistant/ar-AA1IoW8E)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2116298/new-covid-variants-symptoms), [[4]](https://www.natureetscience.com/news/other/all-about-stratus-new-covid-variant-on-the-rise-in-uk-could-be-the-most-vaccine-resistant/ar-AA1IoW8E), [[5]](https://healthmatters.nyp.org/what-to-know-about-the-new-covid-variant-nb-1-8-1-known-as-nimbus-and-how-to-protect-yourself-this-summer/), [[6]](https://www.timeout.com/uk/news/new-stratus-and-nimbus-covid-strains-in-the-uk-symptoms-and-what-you-need-to-know-100125), [[7]](https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/nimbus-and-stratus-variants-spread-amid-vaccine-policy-shifts-353489)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2116298/new-covid-variants-symptoms)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2116298/new-covid-variants-symptoms), [[2]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/health/stratus-covid-variant-symptoms-signs-vaccine-uk-b2783498.html), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-30/nimbus-and-stratus-should-i-be-worried-about-the-new-covid-variants), [[4]](https://www.natureetscience.com/news/other/all-about-stratus-new-covid-variant-on-the-rise-in-uk-could-be-the-most-vaccine-resistant/ar-AA1IoW8E), [[5]](https://healthmatters.nyp.org/what-to-know-about-the-new-covid-variant-nb-1-8-1-known-as-nimbus-and-how-to-protect-yourself-this-summer/), [[6]](https://www.timeout.com/uk/news/new-stratus-and-nimbus-covid-strains-in-the-uk-symptoms-and-what-you-need-to-know-100125), [[7]](https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/nimbus-and-stratus-variants-spread-amid-vaccine-policy-shifts-353489)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.natureetscience.com/news/other/all-about-stratus-new-covid-variant-on-the-rise-in-uk-could-be-the-most-vaccine-resistant/ar-AA1IoW8E), [[5]](https://healthmatters.nyp.org/what-to-know-about-the-new-covid-variant-nb-1-8-1-known-as-nimbus-and-how-to-protect-yourself-this-summer/), [[7]](https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/nimbus-and-stratus-variants-spread-amid-vaccine-policy-shifts-353489)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2116298/new-covid-variants-symptoms), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-30/nimbus-and-stratus-should-i-be-worried-about-the-new-covid-variants), [[5]](https://healthmatters.nyp.org/what-to-know-about-the-new-covid-variant-nb-1-8-1-known-as-nimbus-and-how-to-protect-yourself-this-summer/), [[6]](https://www.timeout.com/uk/news/new-stratus-and-nimbus-covid-strains-in-the-uk-symptoms-and-what-you-need-to-know-100125)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2116298/new-covid-variants-symptoms> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/health/stratus-covid-variant-symptoms-signs-vaccine-uk-b2783498.html> - The Independent reports on the emergence of the XFG variant, known as Stratus, which has rapidly become the dominant strain in the UK. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) notes that Stratus accounts for approximately 30% of COVID-19 cases in England. Despite its prevalence, there is no evidence to suggest that Stratus causes more severe illness than previous variants. The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated Stratus as a 'variant under monitoring' due to its increased prevalence. Health experts emphasize the importance of vaccination, particularly for older adults, to mitigate potential risks associated with this variant.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-30/nimbus-and-stratus-should-i-be-worried-about-the-new-covid-variants> - ITV News discusses the rapid spread of two new COVID-19 variants in the UK: XFG, known as Stratus, and NB.1.8.1, known as Nimbus. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) reports that Stratus accounts for 63% of monitored cases, while Nimbus represents 25%. Both variants are associated with symptoms similar to previous strains, including sore throat, cough, and fatigue. The UKHSA advises individuals to avoid contact with vulnerable people and to stay home if possible. Vaccination remains a key measure in protecting against severe illness from these variants.
4. <https://www.natureetscience.com/news/other/all-about-stratus-new-covid-variant-on-the-rise-in-uk-could-be-the-most-vaccine-resistant/ar-AA1IoW8E> - Nature & Science reports on the rise of the Stratus variant (XFG) in the UK, which is believed to be more contagious than earlier variants due to mutations that help it evade the immune system. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) notes that Stratus accounts for around 30% of COVID-19 cases in England. A distinctive symptom of this variant is a hoarse voice. Despite its increased transmissibility, there is no evidence to suggest that Stratus causes more severe illness than previous variants. Health experts emphasize the importance of vaccination, particularly for older adults, to mitigate potential risks associated with this variant.
5. <https://healthmatters.nyp.org/what-to-know-about-the-new-covid-variant-nb-1-8-1-known-as-nimbus-and-how-to-protect-yourself-this-summer/> - Health Matters provides information on the NB.1.8.1 variant, known as Nimbus, highlighting its strong binding to the ACE2 receptor and high infectivity in lab-grown cells. Symptoms associated with Nimbus include sore throat, fever, fatigue, cough, sneezing, runny nose or congestion, and gastrointestinal issues such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. The article emphasizes that, so far, Nimbus has not caused severe disease compared to other variants, and there has been no dramatic increase in hospitalizations. Vaccination remains a crucial line of defense against severe illness, and individuals are encouraged to consult their clinicians about getting the latest vaccine.
6. <https://www.timeout.com/uk/news/new-stratus-and-nimbus-covid-strains-in-the-uk-symptoms-and-what-you-need-to-know-100125> - Time Out London discusses the emergence of the Stratus (XFG) and Nimbus (NB.1.8.1) COVID-19 variants in the UK. Both variants are associated with symptoms similar to previous strains, including sore throat, cough, and fatigue. A distinctive symptom of Stratus is a hoarse voice, while Nimbus is linked to a 'razor-blade' sore throat. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) emphasizes that these variants do not appear to cause more severe illness than earlier strains and advises individuals to get vaccinated when eligible. Vaccination remains a key measure in protecting against severe illness from these variants.
7. <https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/nimbus-and-stratus-variants-spread-amid-vaccine-policy-shifts-353489> - The Pinnacle Gazette reports on the spread of the Nimbus (NB.1.8.1) and Stratus (XFG) COVID-19 variants amid vaccine policy shifts. Laboratory studies highlight functional differences between the two: Nimbus shows strong binding to the ACE2 receptor and high infectivity, while Stratus appears better at evading antibodies. Despite these differences, vaccines remain a crucial line of defense. The article also notes that UK doctors have reported a 'razor blade' sensation in the throat as a symptom associated with Nimbus, along with gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.