# UK faces surge in Covid cases driven by new contagious Stratus and Nimbus variants



Britons have been advised to wear masks in crowded public spaces and to isolate if they test positive for Covid-19, amid a notable surge in cases driven by two new variants of the virus. These strains, named XFG (commonly called Stratus) and NB.1.8.1 (dubbed Nimbus), are behind a rapid increase in infections, with cases having doubled since August.

Professor Lawrence Young, a virologist at Warwick University, described the rise in cases and hospitalisations as "worrying so early in the Autumn period." He attributed this to several factors, including the return of children to school, colder weather prompting more indoor gatherings in poorly ventilated spaces, and waning immunity in the population. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) recently reported an increase in positivity rates from 7.6% to 8.4% in a week, alongside a rise in Covid admissions from 2.0 to 2.73 per 100,000 people.

While neither the Stratus nor Nimbus variants appear to cause more severe illness than previous Covid strains, genetic changes in the virus are enabling infections to become more contagious. Stratus, first detected in Southeast Asia in January and now dominant in the UK, is particularly associated with a persistent dry cough, tiredness, fever, and uniquely, a ‘razor blade’ sore throat. Nimbus, first identified in China and now spreading across Europe and the US, may trigger gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, and constipation.

Experts are urging people to take sensible precautions amid this surge. Although it is no longer legally required to isolate after testing positive, the UKHSA advises voluntary isolation to protect vulnerable groups. Professor Young emphasised personal responsibility, recommending testing and isolation until no longer infectious. Similarly, Professor Stephen Griffin of the University of Leeds highlighted the importance of reducing mixing in confined spaces and wearing masks, especially filtering types like FFP2 or FFP3, in crowded or poorly ventilated environments.

Professor Griffin, who himself has experienced long Covid, stressed that Covid remains a serious illness, capable of causing both acute symptoms and long-term effects, regardless of prior health or previous infection history. He criticised the current approach encouraging children with symptoms to attend school, advocating instead for isolation to prevent spread. He also called for improved indoor air quality as part of broader public health measures.

The government’s winter vaccination campaign has recently been launched, urging those eligible—such as over-75s, immunocompromised individuals, care home residents, pregnant women, and children—to receive their Covid booster alongside flu vaccines. While Covid tests are no longer free on the NHS, they remain accessible through pharmacies. Some private clinics also offer booster shots, albeit at significant cost.

The UKHSA estimates that Stratus accounts for about 63% of monitored cases in the UK, with Nimbus comprising roughly 25%. Despite their high transmissibility, current evidence does not indicate these variants cause more severe illness than earlier Omicron strains, according to the World Health Organization. Health officials continue to advise that people with respiratory infection symptoms, especially if unwell, should stay home and minimize contact with vulnerable individuals, using masks if going out is unavoidable.

UK ministers have reiterated they are unlikely to impose new lockdowns unless a significantly more dangerous variant emerges. Instead, they rely on public responsibility and vaccination to manage the evolving Covid landscape, which remains dynamic as new variants like Stratus and Nimbus take hold.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/expert-warns-households-as-stratus-variant-sweeps-uk/bmeeqt8), [[5]](https://www.starsinsider.com/Health/810939/new-covid-variant-nimbus-spreads-rapidly-in-us)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://dailytuesday.co.uk/nimbus-stratus-covid19-variants-explained/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theweek.com/health/the-new-stratus-covid-strain-and-why-its-on-the-rise), [[4]](https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/expert-warns-households-as-stratus-variant-sweeps-uk/bmeeqt8), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-new-variant-nimbus-nb-1-8-1-symptoms-cases-b2773272.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/expert-warns-households-as-stratus-variant-sweeps-uk/bmeeqt8), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-new-variant-nimbus-nb-1-8-1-symptoms-cases-b2773272.html), [[6]](https://dailytuesday.co.uk/nimbus-stratus-covid19-variants-explained/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theweek.com/health/the-new-stratus-covid-strain-and-why-its-on-the-rise), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-strain-2025-new-variant-symptoms-uk-b2783130.html), [[5]](https://www.starsinsider.com/Health/810939/new-covid-variant-nimbus-spreads-rapidly-in-us)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://dailytuesday.co.uk/nimbus-stratus-covid19-variants-explained/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15155577/staying-safe-covid-new-strains-surge-stratus-nimbus.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theweek.com/health/the-new-stratus-covid-strain-and-why-its-on-the-rise> - A new Covid sub-variant, XFG, nicknamed 'Stratus', has become dominant in the UK, now accounting for a majority of new cases amid the highest infection levels of the year. It presents usual Covid symptoms such as cough, fever, and loss of taste or smell, but is particularly noted for causing a severe, razor-blade-like sore throat. Despite its rapid spread, health authorities including the UK Health Service Agency (UKHSA) assert that current vaccines remain effective, and there’s no indication Stratus leads to more severe illness than previous variants.
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-strain-2025-new-variant-symptoms-uk-b2783130.html> - A new Covid variant, XFG, is spreading across the world, with Southeast Asia countries reporting a surge in cases. In the UK, the Health Security Agency has said the variant accounted for 30 per cent of cases in England in late June. However, the true extent of the variant's spread remains uncertain, largely due to a significant reduction in Covid-19 testing compared to the peak of the global pandemic five years ago.
4. <https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/expert-warns-households-as-stratus-variant-sweeps-uk/bmeeqt8> - A new Covid variant called Stratus has become the dominant strain across the UK, now accounting for nearly 40 per cent of all cases. The strain, officially known as XFG, is being monitored by the World Health Organisation and has prompted health experts to issue specific household guidance. The variant presents with distinctive symptoms that differ from previous Covid strains. Dr Kader, a medical expert known on social media as doctor.k, explains that people are experiencing severe sore throats, hoarse voices, and gastrointestinal symptoms including nausea, vomiting, and acid reflux.
5. <https://www.starsinsider.com/Health/810939/new-covid-variant-nimbus-spreads-rapidly-in-us> - A new COVID variant called 'Stratus' has rapidly become the dominant strain in the UK, raising concerns among experts about a potential surge in infections. Known scientifically as XFG, it is believed to be more contagious than earlier variants due to mutations that help it evade the immune system. One of its main symptoms is a dry, sore throat. According to recent data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), XFG has grown from making up around 10% of COVID cases in May to nearly 40% by mid-June, confirming its swift spread across the UK.
6. <https://dailytuesday.co.uk/nimbus-stratus-covid19-variants-explained/> - Discovered in early 2025, NB.1.8.1 has grown rapidly, making up 11% of sequenced cases globally by April—up from just 2.5% a month earlier. XFG has spread even faster, now accounting for 25% of European cases. Both variants have led to rises in infections and hospitalisations in regions like Asia and India. Still, neither shows signs of causing more severe illness compared to other Omicron variants, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-new-variant-nimbus-nb-1-8-1-symptoms-cases-b2773272.html> - Covid-19 is once again making headlines more than five years after the initial outbreak, with a new variant spreading in the UK and several countries across the globe. The new strain, named NB.1.8.1 and also known as ‘Nimbus’, now accounts for just over 10 per cent of global infections, with cases now confirmed in England and Northern Ireland. While there is no evidence that the new strain causes more severe symptoms, experts believe that it can infect cells more efficiently and can trigger gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhoea, constipation and nausea.