



## New Covid subvariant keeps world on its toes

### Description

**The newest Covid-19 subvariant to be identified, called Eris or EG.5, is a clear indication that the virus is still around. We must all keep taking precautions.**

While the new Eris subvariant of Covid-19 can spread more quickly, it is generally not as severe as the Omicron variant from which it is descended. This is primarily because Eris has key mutations on its spike protein that make it more contagious, a feature that distinguishes it from Omicron, the World Health Organization (WHO) explains. So, although Eris is highly transmissible, it is not considered to be as deadly.

The South African Department of Health reported its first case of Covid-19 due to the Eris subvariant in Gauteng in June 2023.

“The new Covid-19 variant shouldn’t be anything to get too worried about,” says Professor Shabir Madhi, vaccinology expert at Wits University. However, due to reduced Covid-19 testing, it is unclear how widespread the Eris subvariant may be, he adds.

On the positive side, there have been no changes in Covid-19-related hospitalisation, but if numbers start to rise in South Africa, more testing should be done to determine which variant is driving the increase.

Globally, Covid-19 is still present and spreading. In addition, more variants and sublineages will continue to emerge as the virus evolves. The largest number of Eris samples detected is from China (2 247), the US (1 356), South Korea (1 040), Japan (814) and the UK (150), resulting in an increase in Covid-19-related hospitalisations in these countries. However, the statistics on Eris’ severity are limited.

Health authorities have warned people living with comorbidities such as HIV, hypertension, diabetes and cancer, and those who are over 65 years old, to take the necessary precautions by wearing masks and sanitising. It is also recommended that they get a vaccine or booster shot if they haven't done so in the past 12 months.

### **Symptoms of Eris**

default watermark



Eris has similar symptoms to Omicron, many of which are the same as the flu or common cold but potentially more intense. These symptoms include a runny or stuffy nose, headache, fatigue, sneezing, sore throat, cough (with or without phlegm), muscle aches and changes to sense of smell.

### **Longer-term measures**

The WHO has recommended that countries update their national Covid-19 programmes to move towards long-term sustained management of the disease – for example, by offering vaccination against the disease and ensuring equitable access to vaccines, treatment and testing.

Countries should also continue collaborative surveillance to detect significant changes in the virus, as well as trends in disease severity and population immunity.

A crucial lesson learnt from Covid-19 is for all countries to have a robust healthcare system capable of responding efficiently to an emergency while simultaneously addressing ongoing healthcare needs.

### **Category**

1. Our Wellness

default watermark