

CORONAVIRUS

As New COVID-19 Variant Spreads, Doctors Fear it Could Alter Pandemic's Course

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WASHINGTON — The pandemic's worst months could be ahead as a variant found in the United Kingdom has been identified in a handful of states across the country.

What You Need To Know

- New COVID-19 variant found in New York, Florida, Colorado, California
- Strain believed to be more contagious, not as deadly
- Appears to be more transmissible among young people
- Experts say mitigation efforts need to continue until more people are vaccinated

New York joined Florida, Colorado, and California on Monday to confirm the presence of the new strain of the virus that's believed to be at least 70% more contagious.

"Undoubtedly this virus has been here for a while," said Dr. Michael Muszynski, a professor at Florida State University College of Medicine.

After the new COVID strain was found in Florida, Muszynski believes it is not only spreading across the state but the country too.

"It's more transmissible; it appears in people under the age of 20 and more transmissible in children," he said in a Zoom interview with Spectrum News Monday.

While the new variant spreads more easily, it doesn't appear to be deadlier. Dr. Syra Madad, an infectious disease epidemiologist and the Senior Director of Special Pathogens at New York City Health and Hospitals, worries the mutation could alter the course of the pandemic.

"The fact that it is much more seemingly transmissible is much more concerning," Madad explained. "When you have a much more transmissible variant more individuals can get infected at the population level, which can put a further strain on hospitals that are already seeing an onslaught of cases."

Health experts believe the COVID-19 vaccines will protect against the new strain.

“We are concerned about the biological effects,” Madad said. "Based on the current analysis that has been conducted is that it does not have an impact on efficacy of the vaccines.”

The discovery of the mutated strain in the U.S. comes as the vaccination effort has lagged. Experts believe this places more urgency on mitigation efforts.

“We can’t quit trying to use masks and staying apart from each other as much as possible. It’s one of our biggest weapons against this virus until we vaccinate a whole lot of people,” Muszynski said.