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A New Strain of Covid-19 Said to be 70 Percent More Contagious; European Countries Ban Travel From UK

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A new variant of the coronavirus, first seen in England, is said to be 70 percent more contagious than the current strain, according to UK scientists. The scientists say the mutation changes the spike protein found on the surface of the virus by increasing its ability to latch onto human cells — allowing the virus to spread 70 percent faster than the dominant strain.

The new Covid-19 variant has at least 23 new genetic changes, which is an unusually high number, according to the scientists (via [the Wall Street Journal](#)). The spike protein contains amino acids that use furin, a body enzyme that breaks down cell coatings and allows Covid-19 to penetrate.

British Government Chief Scientist Adviser Patrick Vallance, said Saturday that studies show the latest variant of the virus spreads significantly faster than earlier strains.

But is the latest strain more deadly, and will the vaccines now available be able to beat it? According to the Wall Street Journal, "a preliminary description of the variant, [published online](#) by scientists associated with a British effort to track genetic variations of the virus, suggested the new strain may have developed in someone suffering from chronic infection, possibly because of a weakened immune system."

According to Mr. Vallance, any conclusions that the new strain may be less dangerous were preliminary. There were also theoretical reasons why the new strain may alter immune response, although he said there was no evidence to backup such assumptions.

"The working assumption is that the vaccine response should be adequate for this virus, but we need to keep vigilant about this," he said, via WSJ.

According to Neville Sanjana of the New York Genome Center, there is no evidence to suggest the new strain has arrived to the U.S.

A number of European countries — among them Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands banned travel from the UK as Europe raced to contain the new variant.