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New Covid-19 Subvariant EG.5 Gains Momentum Amid Rising US Infections

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As the United States braces itself for another surge of respiratory illnesses this autumn, a new offshoot of the Omicron variant named EG.5 is quickly gaining traction, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Despite the less disruptive nature of Covid-19 compared to its early days, recent data indicates that the virus remains unpredictable and continues to evolve.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the subvariant EG.5, which originated from XBB.1.9.2, has already been identified in 51 countries since August 7. Last week, the WHO classified EG.5 as a "variant of interest". The CDC reported that by August 5, EG.5 is expected to account for approximately 17 percent of U.S. Covid-19 cases, making it the country's predominant

variant.

However, not all reports about this variant paint a gloomy picture. While EG.5 has properties that allow it to escape immune response, the WHO finds no evidence that it is more severe. Dr. Shira Doron from Tufts Medicine in Boston notes that many of the recent infections resemble cold symptoms, suggesting that EG.5 might not be as menacing as other variants, according to a report in the Wall Street Journal.

Yet, challenges lie ahead, especially with the CDC's inability to forecast variant trends due to limited testing and sequencing data.

In anticipation of the upcoming fall vaccination drive, health officials are taking a new approach. Unlike previous campaigns where the government purchased vaccines, this year vaccines will be procured and distributed through the commercial market. These vaccines, tailored to tackle the XBB.1.5 strain, are based on guidelines set by the Food and Drug Administration earlier this year.

As the world waits for the updated vaccines, pharmaceutical giants like Pfizer are optimistic. Pfizer CEO, Albert Bourla, anticipates approval for their new shots this month, aiming for a September rollout. Pfizer, alongside its partner BioNTech, is currently testing to ensure the booster's efficacy against EG.5. On the other hand, Moderna announced an abundant supply of its revised vaccine and is awaiting FDA approval.

With Novavax approaching regulators to authorize its booster shot, discussions about whether to get a current booster or wait for the newer versions are circulating. Dr. John Moore of Weill Cornell Medicine advises patients to consult their physicians. "It's very individual. There's no simple bucket in which every American can be put," he stated, according to WSJ.

Adding to health concerns, officials are also gearing up for potential outbreaks of other respiratory infections. The FDA's recent approval of the first RSV vaccines for adults aged 60 and above and a new medication to shield infants indicates the heightened preparations underway to combat such outbreaks.