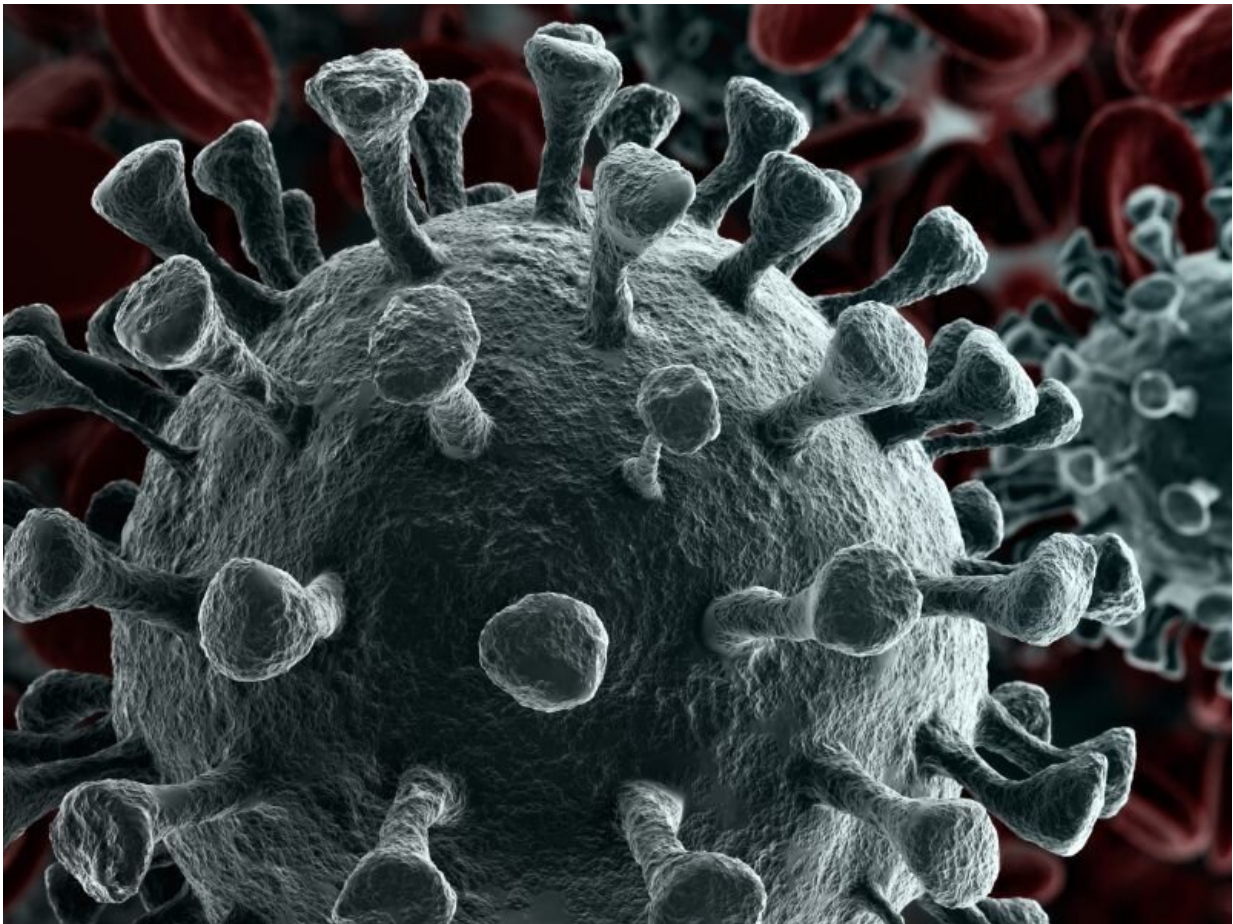


New coronavirus variants spreading across U.S., White House experts say

January 27 2021, by Dennis Thompson



(HealthDay)—New and more infectious coronavirus variants are

beginning to appear in the United States, but all have remained vulnerable to the two vaccines now being distributed to Americans, the White House COVID-19 Response Team said Wednesday.

There have been 308 cases of the British variants confirmed in 26 states as of Jan. 26, said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The variant has been found in 47 countries to date.

Public health officials this week also identified the first U.S. case of the Brazilian variant, which appeared in Minnesota, Walensky said. That variant has only been spotted in five countries.

A third variant from South Africa, which popped up in 20 countries, has not been detected yet in this country, Walensky added.

"The variants that have been identified recently seem to spread more easily and are more transmissible, which can lead to an increased number of cases and increased stress on our already taxed health care system," Walensky said.

However, these variants do not seem to be able to outmaneuver either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser.

The United Kingdom variant has a "very slight, if at all, impact on [vaccine](#)-induced antibodies," Fauci said.

The South African variant, which has yet to reach U.S. soil, is a "bit more problematic" because it appears to respond less well to the vaccines, Fauci said.

"However, and this is an important however, it still is well within the cushion of protection," Fauci said of the South African strain. "You could diminish the vaccine-induced antibody efficacy by a few-fold and still be within the protective range of the vaccine."

Phase 3 clinical trial results are expected within days for a third COVID-19 vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson, and Fauci said those results could provide more insight into these mutations and their interactions with vaccines.

"It's going to be looking at efficacy not only in the United States but also in South Africa and in Brazil," Fauci said. "We'll have some comparative efficacy which will inform us on where we would go if [the South African] lineage seats itself in the United States."

The CDC is pushing to improve genetic sequencing of new COVID-19 cases across the country, and [public health officials](#) are prepared to develop "booster" shots of the existing vaccines that would cover any future mutations that impede vaccine-induced immunity, Fauci said.

"We will be monitoring in real time the effect of antibodies that we induce with the current vaccines and with future vaccines, as to what impact they have on the ability to neutralize these mutants," Fauci said. "As we see them getting further and further toward a more vulnerable part, that's when we trigger...making a version of the same vaccine that in fact would be directed specifically against the relevant mutant."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control has more about [COVID-19](#).

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