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What are the symptoms of the COVID-19 variant Pirola?

Cases of COVID-19 are on the rise, fuelled by the spread of a new variant called Pirola. But how can you tell if you have the virus – and should you isolate yourself?

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has launched a new [COVID-19](#) and flu dashboard following an increase in the number of infected patients in hospitals in the UK.

According to the dashboard, there were more than 11,000 positive COVID-19 cases reported in England in the week leading up to and including 20 September 2023¹. However, although cases are on the rise, they are not as high as they were this time in 2022.

The rise in new cases has been linked to the COVID-19 variant BA.2.86, which is also known as [Pirola](#). It is a sub-variant of [Omicron](#) and has more than 30 mutations in its spike protein, compared with other Omicron variants. This means it may spread more easily, as the spike protein is how the virus enters human cells.

The UKHSA said Pirola has been identified in most regions, but added that vaccination offered protection against serious illness caused by the coronavirus.

Professor Susan Hopkins, chief medical advisor of the UKHSA said in a statement:

"The autumn vaccination programme has started and this new data shows once again how important it is that the most vulnerable among us are fully vaccinated in order to receive the greatest possible protection. I urge everyone eligible to come forward for their next dose as soon as they are called."

What are the symptoms of Pirola?

The most common symptoms include: **Sneezing, sore throat, headache, fatigue, high temperature**, a runny nose, changes to your sense of **taste** or **smell**.

Less common symptoms include: **Skin rashes**, changes in the mouth or tongue - such as ulcers or soreness - sore fingers or toes, **diarrhoea** and itchy eyes².

Should you self-isolate if you have COVID-19?

If you or your child have tested positive for [COVID-19](#), you should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day the test was taken if you are under 18.

If you're over 18, you should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days after the day you took your test.

It's important to avoid meeting people who are more likely to get seriously ill from viruses - such as the elderly or people with a weakened immune system - for 10 days after the day you took your test.

Where to get a COVID-19 test

Some people are eligible for free [COVID-19](#) lateral flow tests.

You may be able to get free COVID-19 tests if:

- You have a certain health condition and are eligible for COVID-19 treatment on the NHS. For example, if you have a weakened immune system, [HIV or AIDS](#), [Down's syndrome](#), severe liver disease or if you are receiving treatment for [cancer](#).

- You work in healthcare or in a hospice.

If you aren't eligible for free COVID-19 tests, you can buy them at a pharmacy.

Further reading

1. [Gov.uk: COVID-19 variants identified in the UK – latest updates.](#)
2. [Visconti et al: Diagnostic value of cutaneous manifestation of SARS-CoV-2 infection.](#)

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