



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**  
Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD  
*Commissioner*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Tuesday, August 29, 2023**

**STATEMENT FROM THE NYC HEALTH COMMISSIONER DR. ASHWIN VASAN  
ON THE BA.2.86 COVID-19 VARIANT**

Like all viruses, Covid-19 adapts, and we continue to adapt to keep New Yorkers safe too. One recent change to COVID-19 is the [BA.2.86 variant](#), which has been seen in other parts of the U.S. and was recently detected in New York City's sewage. While we have yet to find it in a specimen from a local resident, it is almost certainly circulating here.

Based on the degree of mutations – while vaccinated people continue to be protected against serious illness – this variant may be more likely to evade immunity that has developed from vaccination or prior infection than earlier variants. But there is currently no indication that it causes more severe illness. We continue to monitor this carefully, alongside our colleagues at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.

As cases rise, precautions become increasingly important, especially for our most vulnerable New Yorkers who are older, disabled, or have underlying health conditions. Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, along with other proven prevention tools – like masking, testing, and staying home when sick – continue to be our best defense against COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. Antibodies from vaccination and prior infection will continue to provide some protection, as will available antiviral treatments like Paxlovid, which is still effective against all circulating strains of COVID-19.

As we enter the traditional respiratory virus season, an updated COVID-19 vaccine is expected to become available in the coming weeks. Studies are still evaluating the new booster for its effectiveness against the [BA.2.86 variant](#), but indicators suggest it will be effective at preventing severe illness and death. That's why it's especially important that New Yorkers that are most vulnerable get the new booster when it's available. New Yorkers should talk to their health care or vaccination providers about the updated COVID-19 vaccine and this year's flu vaccine. It is also a perfect time to get this year's flu vaccine when available. For new parents, talk to your child's pediatrician about the benefits of the RSV monoclonal antibody for infants, and for older or at-risk adults, talk to your provider about getting the new RSV vaccine. For assistance with finding a health care provider, call 311 or visit [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov) to find a location near you and make an appointment.

###

**MEDIA CONTACT:** [PressOffice@health.nyc.gov](mailto:PressOffice@health.nyc.gov)