

# NEWS BRIEF

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## What to Know About the New Coronavirus “Kraken” Strain

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that the coronavirus XBB.1.5 Omicron variant, known as “Kraken,” is spreading quickly and has become the dominant coronavirus strain in the nation.

Many experts predict an increase in hospitalizations and deaths, although it’s expected that the Kraken variant won’t be as severe as the original Omicron variant surge one year ago. Regardless, with the rapid rise of a new strain, many employers will take precautionary measures to prevent workplace outbreaks of COVID-19 and other circulating respiratory illnesses (e.g., influenza).

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***XBB.1.5 (“Kraken”) is the most transmissible COVID-19 subvariant detected to date, according to the World Health Organization.***

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### What Is Kraken?

The Kraken variant has been found in 70 countries and has now made its way to the United States. Symptoms are the same as those of regular COVID-19 infections, the most common being cold-like symptoms (e.g., runny nose, congestion, a sore throat and a cough). Similar to other Omicron variants, the Kraken strain is highly contagious but likely doesn’t cause more serious diseases.

Studies suggest that the Omicron bivalent COVID-19 booster is still effective in protecting against severe

illness. However, those who’ve had a recent COVID-19 infection or received the COVID-19 vaccine can still become sick with the Kraken variant.

### What Can Employers Do?

Despite the new variant’s high transmission, the CDC’s [COVID-19 guidance](#) remains the same as they continue investigating how the Kraken variant may differ from other Omicron lineages.

With the new variant rapidly circulating, many employers are reevaluating their workplace strategies and considering the following precautionary measures to prevent outbreaks:

- Promote hand hygiene and make alcohol-based hand sanitizer readily available.
- Encourage respiratory hygiene (or cough/sneeze etiquette) and provide easy access to tissues and trash cans.
- Provide resources and education about COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases.
- Advise employees to stay home if sick. Employers may also offer flexible policies (e.g., remote work or paid time off) encouraging sick workers to stay home.
- Ensure proper ventilation to decrease the transmission of respiratory viruses.

Employers should continue to monitor COVID-19 transmission in their communities. Stay tuned for further pandemic-related updates from Houska Insurance.

