

## COVID variants present new threat as US virus cases plateau

[Dr. Ashish K. Jha](#), dean of the Brown University School of Public Health and a leading expert on infectious diseases, is warning that progress against the pandemic might be faltering as worrisome coronavirus variants take hold.

“Over past week, number of infections in U.S. has stopped declining,” Jha, whose threads on the pandemic have taken on the status of required reading among public health observers, tweeted [March 17]. “At about 50K infections every day. About where we were at height of summer surge. Why the stall?”

He cited [the B.1.1.7. variant, which first emerged in Britain](#), as a possible factor.

“Suspect B.1.1.7 is now starting to really have an effect,” Jha wrote. “And states are opening up. This is a problem.”

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

“There is only limited data available on the prevalence of the variants, but the data that is available seems to suggest that in many places, one or more variants are on the cusp of out-competing the predominant strains,” [infectious disease expert Nicholas] Reich said in the e-mail. “This is a concerning trend. To me it suggests that these next 4-6 weeks are a very critical phase for staying very vigilant, and not letting our guard down while we continue to get shots into arms.”

“Yes, we should be worried,” he said.

[Read the original post](#)