



Weekly Alert June 6th, 2024

## New "FLiRT" variants of COVID emerge

### ***3 of 4 Texans have heard about it***

Like other viruses, COVID-19 mutates over time to form new variants and subvariants. The latest COVID-19 variants and subvariants are called FLiRT.

#### **Awareness of FLiRT in Texas is high**

FLiRT variants were detected in wastewater monitoring in April 2024, and by the third week in May accounted for 28% of new COVID-19 cases in the U.S. Among Texas adults surveyed last week, 75% reported hearing about FLiRT in the last week, up 33% from the previous week. Men were more likely than women to report hearing about FLiRT (84% vs. 63%). In all, 591 adults from five states were included in the survey, and awareness of FLiRT was highest in Texas.

#### **How is FLiRT different from previous COVID variants?**

Unlike the prior COVID-19 variant (JN.1), FLiRT variants have two **spike protein mutations**. These could increase ease of transmitting the virus. However, current data shows **no significant rise** in hospitalizations or new symptoms associated with the FLiRT subvariants.

#### **How is FLiRT affecting Texas?**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention **estimated** that the FLiRT infection rate will likely increase in Texas and 11 other states. As of May 30, the Wastewater Viral Activity Level for FLiRT in Texas is rated as "Moderate." Although FLiRT variants may cause an uptick in cases this summer, the rate would likely still be lower than in previous years with new variants.

#### **How can Texans protect against the FLiRT variants?**

Based on current information, existing vaccines and treatments are expected to remain effective for protecting against severe illness from these variants. People at higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection should continue to take precautions to avoid contracting COVID-19. This includes staying current on vaccinations and masking in public or crowded indoor spaces. In February, the CDC recommended that people over 65 receive a COVID-19 booster.

# Help Texans stay informed about the FLiRT variants.

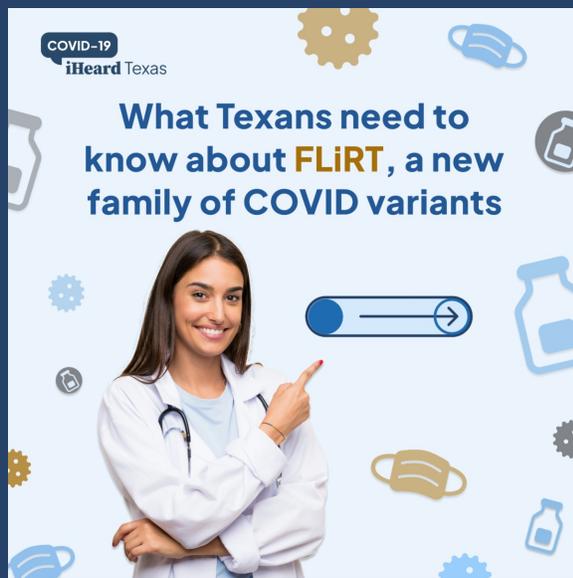
Community organizations in Texas can share the resources below to help residents take protective actions against COVID-19 FLiRT variants.

This week's report is based on responses from a panel of 80 adult residents of Texas surveyed Jun 1-3, 2024. Explore this data and more at [iHeard Texas](#).

## Shareable Resources

Click to download resources to share in your community.  
Remember to include #iHeardTexas #iHeardTX when sharing on social media!

### FLiRT Detected



An infographic with a white background and a dark blue box containing text. The iHeard Texas logo is in the top right. The text in the dark blue box lists four bullet points: 'Compared to other COVID-19 variants...', 'FLiRT may spread more easily due to mutations in their spike proteins', 'There is no evidence FLiRT has more severe symptoms or hospitalizations', and 'FLiRT variants are now the dominant COVID-19 strains in the U.S.'. The final bullet point also states 'CDC predicts FLiRT infection rates will likely grow in Texas'. At the bottom right, it says 'Sources: CDC, Johns Hopkins University'.

An infographic with a white background and blue and yellow accents. The iHeard Texas logo is in the top right. The title is 'Don't flirt with FLiRT!'. Below the title is a blue box with the text 'Use these strategies to reduce spread:'. There are four icons with corresponding text: a vaccine bottle icon for 'Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines', a hand hygiene icon for 'Practice good hygiene', a window icon for 'Improve air flow where you live or work', and a face mask icon for 'Mask as needed'. At the bottom right, it says 'Source: CDC'.

*Suggested caption:*

□ A new group of COVID-19 variants, called FLiRT, has been detected. □ Over 7 in 10 Texans are aware of these variants. While FLiRT variants have spike protein mutations, there's no significant rise in hospitalizations or new symptoms. Stay safe by keeping up with vaccinations

and taking precautions, especially for those at higher risk.

#COVID19 #FLiRTVariants #StayInformed #TexasHealth #PublicHealth #VaccineAwareness

[Download here](#)

## What Texans need to know

**What Texans need to know about FLiRT, a new family of COVID variants**

- Compared to other COVID-19 variants...
  - FLiRT may **spread more easily** due to mutations in their spike proteins
  - There is **no evidence** FLiRT has more severe symptoms or hospitalizations
  - FLiRT variants are now the **dominant COVID-19 strains** in the U.S.
  - CDC predicts FLiRT infection rates will **likely grow in Texas**

Use these strategies to reduce spread:

- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines
- Practice good hygiene
- Improve air flow where you live or work
- Mask as needed

COVID-19 iHeard Texas Sources: CDC, Johns Hopkins University

[Download here](#)

## Combined Resource

Click to download a printer-friendly PDF with all the information above!

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