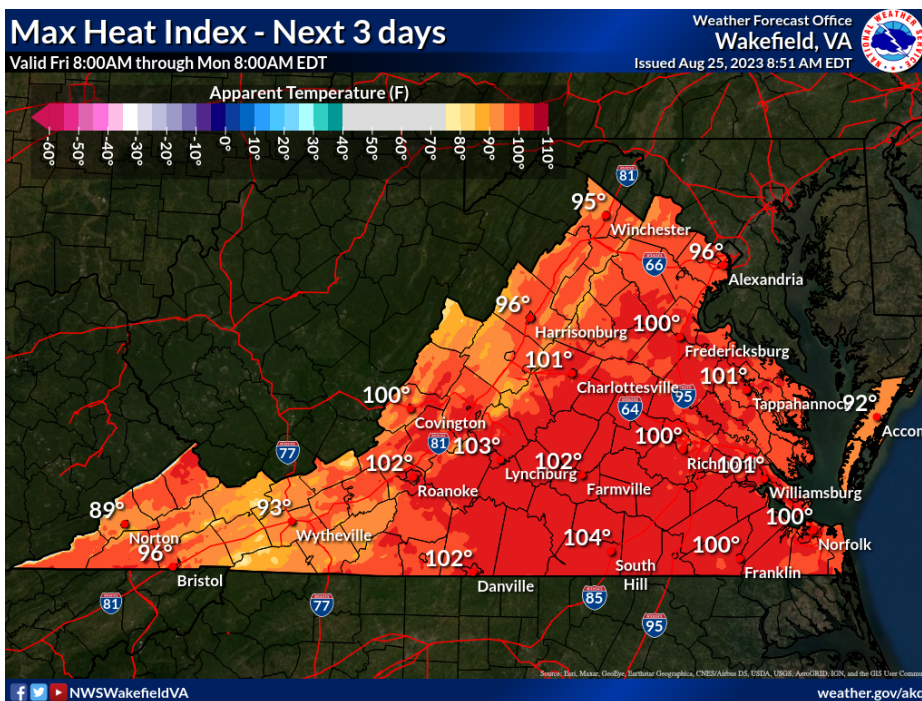


August 18, 2023

Key Takeaways

- COVID-19 indicators continue to increase. While still low, COVID-19 hospital admissions increased 22% in Virginia for the week ending August 19, similar to national levels.
- Virginia is expected to experience extreme heat today (Friday), with heat indexes requiring extreme caution in most of the state, and reaching dangerous levels in a few spots. Extreme heat will persist on Saturday, but temperatures are expected to cool early next week.
- The WHO has included BA.2.86 as a Variant Under Monitoring. BA.2.86 has a large number of mutations and has been detected in several geographically disperse countries. Although early, there is no evidence of increased severity or transmission, and BA.2.86 appears to compete much less effectively against existing variants compared to Omicron.
- Maryland experienced its first case of locally acquired malaria in over 40 years. Florida and Texas have also reported similar cases this year.
- Officials and community members continue to respond to the wildfires that devastated parts of Maui on August 8.

Key Figures



Source: National Weather Service

COVID-19

11%

Chance that the WHO will identify a new COVID-19 Variant of Concern in 2023. (Metaculus forecast)

57%

Chance that the Virginia will experience a COVID-19 surge in 2023. (Metaculus forecast)

Wildfires

663 of 1035

The number of uncontrolled wildfires in Canada, out of the total number of active fires.

Spotlight: COVID-19

Forecasts are italicized

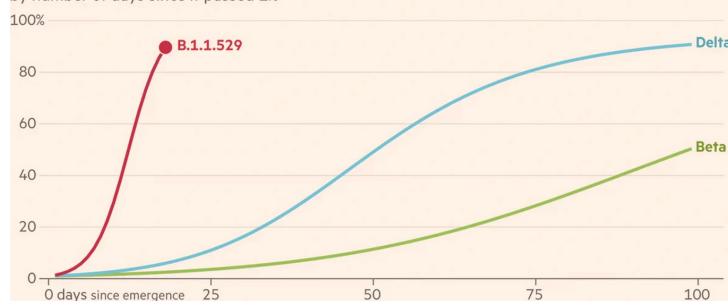
Spotlight

- **COVID-19 hospital admissions remain low in Virginia.** Despite both increasing 22% last week (in-line with [national trends](#)) hospital admissions and diagnoses at emergency facilities remain low. COVID-19 hospital occupancy increased 72%, but to levels still categorized as minimal.
- **WHO added BA.2.86 to its Variant Under Monitoring (VUM) list.** VUM is the least significant classification for variants, below Variants of Interest and Variants of Concern. As of yet, little is known about BA.2.86; however, it has a large number of mutations (30+) and has been detected in several geographically dispersed countries.
- **In a BA.2.86 risk assessment, the CDC notes it is closely monitoring hospital rates.** While it is too soon to assess impacts, there has been no evidence of increased severity, or of increases in cases or ED visits in locations where BA.2.86 has been detected. The CDC expects immunity from vaccination or previous infection will continue to offer protection from severe disease.
- **BA.2.86 has been detected in the United States.** One detection was associated with a traveler returning through Dulles, while another is a preliminary detection from wastewater. The first case was from a sample collected on August 3 in Michigan.

COVID-19

A new variant is spreading rapidly in South Africa, and appears to be out-competing other variants much faster than previous variants of concern did

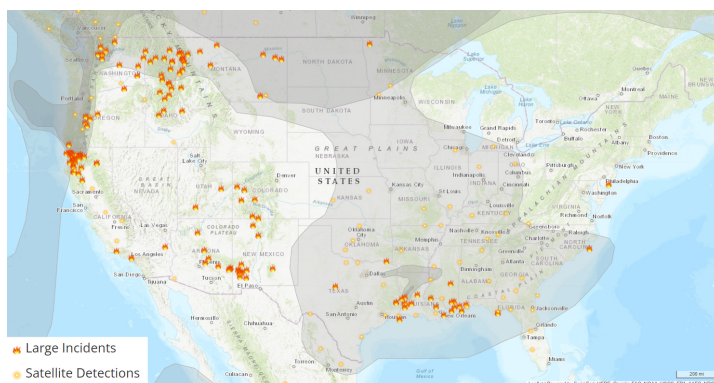
Share of all sequenced cases* in South Africa accounted for by each variant, by number of days since it passed 1%



*Growth of B.1.1.529 is modelled from SGTF data rather than full genomic sequences
 Source: FT analysis of data from GISAID and the South African National Health Laboratory Service
 © FT

This graph shows how rapidly Omicron (then labeled B.1.1.529) became the dominant variant in South Africa when first detected in November 2021. BA.2.86 was first detected in Denmark on July 24. There have been fewer than 10 detections in the month since. Although genomic surveillance has waned since 2021, this suggests BA.2.86 is unlikely to have the same impact Omicron did, despite a comparable jump in evolution. Image Source: Financial Times via [Eric Topol](#).

Other News



Wildfires continue across the Pacific Northwest and Southwest, and a number of large wildfires began in the South over the past week. Virginia is currently only reporting a few small fires, but the fall [fire season](#) starts on October 15. Source: [fire.airnow.gov](#)

- **Severe heat is causing deaths in prisons across nation.** A new study published in [PLOS One](#) found that heatwaves [increase prisoner mortality](#) across all regions of the U.S.
- **LewisGale Medical Center upgraded to Level II trauma center.** The [hospital in Salem](#) is now the only such facility west of Lynchburg. The region is also served by Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, a Level I trauma center.

- **Locally acquired malaria in Maryland.** For the first time in about 40 years, Maryland has reported a [case of malaria](#) not related to travel. It joins Texas and Florida which both reported their first local cases in decades last June.
- **West Nile virus (WNV) in West Virginia.** A man in Hardy County is the state's first [WNV case of the year](#). The virus has been detected in Virginia by mosquito trapping, but the Commonwealth has yet to report a human case in 2023.
- **Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) death in Alabama.** EEE has been detected in mosquitos in Virginia, but so far this year cases have been limited to Louisiana and [Alabama](#). Virginia has reported only two EEE cases in the last 20 years.
- **H5N6 avian flu case detected in Sichuan.** This is the [fifth H5N6 infection in China](#) this year. Most patients reported contact with infected birds or a contaminated environment. Yet, there is no evidence of sustained human transmission.
- **Finland culls mink and foxes to combat H5N1 avian flu.** Officials detected the virus in birds in June, and on fur farms in July. The total of [culled animals now stands at 120,000](#). Though [mammal-to-mammal transmission](#) was detected, there have been no human outbreaks in Finland.