



Britain on Thursday said it was concerned by a newly identified coronavirus variant spreading in South Africa that might make vaccines less effective and imperil efforts to fight the pandemic.

The UK Health Security Agency said the variant, which is called B.1.1.529, has a spike protein that was dramatically different to the one in the original coronavirus that COVID-19 vaccines are based on.

A social distancing sign is seen amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Leicester, Britain, May 27, 2021. REUTERS/Andrew Boyers

"This is the most significant variant we have encountered to date and urgent research is underway to learn more about its transmissibility, severity and vaccine-susceptibility," UKHSA Chief Executive Jenny Harries said.

The variant was first identified at the start of this week, but Britain rushed to introduce travel restrictions on South Africa and five neighbouring countries, acting much more swiftly than with the currently dominant Delta variant.

[More...](#)