

Swiss detect first case of Brazilian virus strain

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A first case of the COVID-19 variant first spotted in Brazil has been found in Switzerland, where the British variant is already spreading rapidly, authorities said Tuesday.

Virginie Masserey, head of the health ministry's infection control department, said the number of cases of new virus variants detected in Switzerland had doubled in the last week to 4,411 cases.

While the specific mutations have not been sequenced in most of those cases, she said 1,692 had been determined to be the more contagious variant first found in Britain, known as B.1.1.7, while 69 cases involved the variant discovered in South Africa, B.1.351.

And "yesterday, we were informed that a first case of the Brazilian variant (P7) has been detected in Switzerland," Masserey told reporters, without providing further details.

Switzerland, a country with some 8.6 million inhabitants, has so far counted more than 533,000 COVID-19 cases, including over 8,900 deaths.

A partial lockdown and other restrictions in place in recent weeks have meanwhile helped drive down the number of new cases, hospitalisations and deaths, experts said.

On Tuesday, Switzerland counted 1,358 new cases and 42 new deaths in the past 24 hours—dramatically lower than the more than 10,000 cases and over 100 deaths registered daily in early November.

But the growing prominence of the new, more contagious variants has experts worried.

While the new variants still only account for a fraction of the overall cases, Bern epidemiologist Christian Althaus told public broadcaster SRF that they account for 60-70 percent of new cases spotted in Geneva.

In the rest of the country, they account for around 40 percent of new [cases](#), the broadcaster reported.

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