



Gleyber Torres
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Aaron Boone

The Yankees' 'breakthrough' COVID-19 infections are a case study in how the virus can spread among vaccinated people



The Yankees' 'breakthrough' COVID-19 infections are a case study in how the virus can spread among vaccinated people

Aria Bendix

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Yankee shortstop Gleyber Torres. Butch Dill-USA TODAY Sports

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- Eight members of the Yankees organization have tested positive for COVID-19 after being vaccinated.
- These kinds of "breakthrough infections" are usually mild or asymptomatic.
- Relaxed restrictions and the spread of variants may have increased the risk of an outbreak.
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The Yankees provided an important lesson in epidemiology this week: Even if you've been fully vaccinated, it's still possible to get the coronavirus. As of Thursday, three of the team's coaches, four members of its support staff, and one player - shortstop Gleyber Torres - have tested positive for COVID-19, though they got vaccinated several weeks ago.

The Yankees players and coaches all received Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot, manager Aaron Boone [told ESPN](#). In clinical trials, that shot was found to cut the risk of coronavirus infection by 66% globally, and by 72% among US trial participants. The trial also found that J&J's shot reduced the risk of severe disease by 85%.

That means a small minority of vaccinated people may still develop "[breakthrough infections](#)," though these are usually mild or asymptomatic.

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Just one of the organization members who tested positive is showing symptoms, Boone [told the New York Times](#) on Wednesday. On Thursday, however, he [told ESPN](#) that all eight members are asymptomatic.

"I feel like, in a lot of ways, because we're vaccinated, we're kind of good and able to deal with this," Boone [told the Times](#).

The Yankees' travel schedule, sustained proximity to one another, and lack of masks may have made the team particularly susceptible to breakthrough infections.

The Yankees relaxed safety protocols in late April, after at least 85% of the traveling team had been vaccinated. That meant players and coaches could take off their masks in the clubhouse and dugouts, per Major League Baseball regulations.

As with any COVID-19 case, the risk of breakthrough infections is highest in close, indoor quarters where people aren't distanced or wearing masks.

"These members are in close contact, aren't masking, sharing locker rooms and meals, etc.," Dr. Purvi Parikh, an immunologist in New York City, told Insider.

The spread of more contagious variants, she added, could also make breakthrough infections more common in crowded environments. Right now, the B.1.1.7 variant - which was first identified in the UK - is the dominant strain in the US. Another variant, B.1.526, accounted for nearly half



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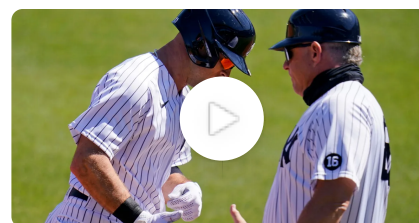
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Yankees' Gleyber Torres tests positive for COVID-19

SNY



7 members of New York Yankees test positive for COVID: ESPN

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of the coronavirus samples genetically sequenced in New York City as of last month. But it's not clear which variant, if any, caused the Yankees outbreak.

The organization also tests regularly for COVID-19, so it's more likely to catch infections than in the average group of people - especially asymptomatic ones.

Other 'breakthrough infection' outbreaks were also relatively mild

Yankees SS Gleyber Torres is 8th member of organization to test positive for COVID-19 this week

Yahoo Sports





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Members of the New York Yankees. Rob Tringali/MLB Photos/Getty Images



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Other breakthrough infections in the US have similarly occurred in clusters.

In March, 26 residents at a Kentucky nursing home tested positive for COVID-19, even though 19 of them had been fully vaccinated with Pfizer's shot. Three people, including one vaccinated resident, died. But more than 86% of the fully vaccinated residents who tested positive were asymptomatic, according to a Centers for Disease Control and

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Prevention report.

The virus' attack rate was also three to four times higher among the unvaccinated residents.

In the case of the Yankees outbreak, "we would expect that the severity is less than it would be otherwise had they not been vaccinated," Emily Gurley, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told Insider.

Aaron Boone announces Yankees have seven positive COVID-19 cases; Gleyber Torres being held out of lineup

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Gleyber Torres

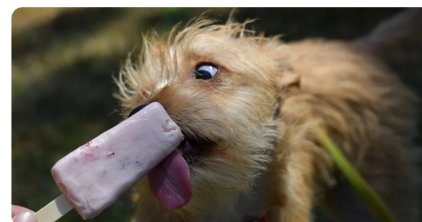
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The goal of vaccines, she added, isn't to eliminate all infections. It's to prevent people from becoming severely ill. In that sense, mild breakthrough infections can be seen as evidence that the vaccines are doing their job.

"Even if we see more infections, if they're all mild, then in my mind that's an acceptable risk because we face the threat of other mild infections on a daily basis," Gurley said. "That's really all we can

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Researchers sequence coronavirus samples at the microbiology laboratory of the University Hospital of Badajoz in Spain on April 15, 2021. Javier Pulpo/Europa Press/Getty Images

As of April 26, the CDC had received around [9,200 reports of breakthrough infections](#) out of more than 95 million people who'd been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by that point. Around 27% of those cases were asymptomatic, and just 1% of those people had died.

But breakthrough infections are often hard to spot, since people with mild or asymptomatic cases may not think to get tested. For that reason, experts said, these cases could be more prevalent than current data suggests.

Variants, too, might be making breakthrough infections more common.

The CDC found that the Kentucky nursing home residents had been infected with a variant that appears to be more transmissible than the original strain. The variant carries a mutation found in two other prominent and highly contagious variants: B.1.351 (first identified in South Africa) and P.1 (first identified in Brazil). Both of those variants have been shown to partially evade protection from vaccines or natural infection with the original strain.

Boone [told ESPN](#) on Thursday that the MLB is looking into whether variants may have played a role in Gleyber Torres' case, since Torres previously



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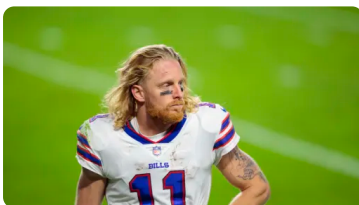
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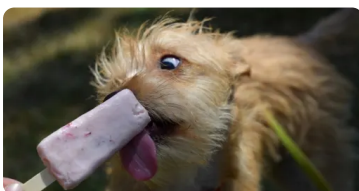
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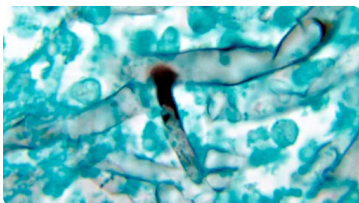
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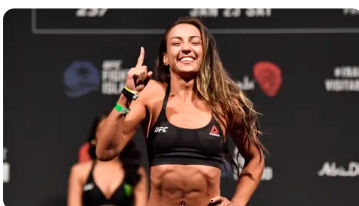
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