



NEWS RELEASE

STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
No. 416 – Jan. 16, 2021

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MDHHS identifies first Michigan case of new COVID-19 variant, B.1.1.7. in Washtenaw County

LANSING, MICH. The first Michigan case of new COVID-19 variant, B.1.1.7. was identified in an adult female living in Washtenaw County by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Bureau of Laboratories today. The person recently traveled to the United Kingdom, where this variant originated. Close contacts of this individual have been identified and are in quarantine. At this time two new cases have been identified from close contacts with the person, but it is not known if they are infected with the variant.

B.1.1.7. is believed to be more contagious, but there has been no indication that it affects the clinical outcomes or disease severity compared to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that has been circulating across the United States for months.

However, a higher rate of transmission could increase the number of people who need to be hospitalized or who lose their lives to COVID-19 should the new variant begin circulating widely in Michigan. To date, the virus has been identified in at least 16 other states and jurisdictions in the U.S. This is the only known case in Michigan at this time, however it is possible that there are more that have not been identified.

“The discovery of this variant in Michigan is concerning, but not unexpected,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. “We all have a personal responsibility to slow the spread of COVID-19 and end this pandemic as quickly as possible. We continue to urge Michiganders to follow a research-based approach by wearing their masks properly, socially distancing, avoiding crowds, washing their hands often, and making a plan to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine once it is their turn.”

Based on available evidence, current tests and vaccines for COVID-19 also work against this new variant. Protective actions that prevent the spread of COVID-19 will also prevent the spread of the new variant, B.1.1.7. Michiganders should:

- Get vaccinated for COVID-19.
- Wear a mask around others.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others.
- Wash hands often.
- Ventilate indoor spaces.

Viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. MDHHS’s Bureau of Laboratories is a national leader in whole genome sequencing for SARS CoV2.

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MDHHS identified the variant in this individual's sample and will continue to conduct whole genome sequencing to quickly identify any variants of interest, including B.1.1.7.

Whole genome sequencing allows scientists to examine the genetic material of pathogens, including SARS-CoV-2. Over the past 10 months, laboratories across Michigan have been submitting samples to the state public health laboratory for surveillance to help monitor the emergence of any variants of concern. MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories prioritizes additional specimens for whole genome sequencing when there is increased concern for a new variant of the virus, such as in people with a travel history to places where the variant is known to be circulating.

At this time, information is limited and changing rapidly. The latest information is available at [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.michigan.gov/Coronavirus) and [CDC.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/Coronavirus).

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