



NEWS RELEASE

STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

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MDHHS, Washtenaw County Health Department Identifies Two More COVID-19 B.1.1.7 Variant Cases Linked to Earlier Case *Individuals who were infected are associated with University of Michigan, which is working with health officials to limit the spread*

LANSING, MICH. Additional cases of B.1.1.7. have been identified in two adult females living in Washtenaw County who were in close contact with the first person in Michigan to be diagnosed with the COVID-19 variant. All three individuals are associated with the University of Michigan.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Washtenaw County Health Department are announcing detection at the U-M laboratory of the two additional variant cases. The cases were among individuals who were close contacts of an adult woman living in Washtenaw County who tested positive for the variant after traveling to the United Kingdom, where B.1.1.7 originated.

MDHHS announced the first case of the variant on Saturday. A total of seven additional cases are linked to that case. It is not yet known whether five other close contacts who have tested positive for COVID-19 are infected with the variant. All eight were directed to isolate.

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.

“Because this variant is more contagious, we have been expecting more B.1.1.7 cases following Michigan’s first case being identified on Saturday,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. “Michiganders have followed the science and worked hard to slow the spread of COVID-19, resulting in dramatic improvements in our case numbers, deaths, hospitalizations and positivity rates. Now we need to redouble our efforts by continuing to wear masks properly, socially distance, avoid crowds, washing hand frequently, and make plans to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine once it is our turn.”

The 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. It is possible that there are more B.1.1.7 cases in Michigan that have not been identified.

“We are watching this situation as closely as possible,” says Juan Luis Marquez, MD, MPH, medical director with Washtenaw County Health Department. “And we ask everyone to continue to do everything they can to prevent transmission – mask, distance, avoid crowds or gatherings, clean your hands frequently, and follow isolation or quarantine guidance carefully.”

The health departments are working closely with U-M on strategies to prevent spread of the virus.

“While not unexpected, this means being even more vigilant with the public health measures that are known to prevent the spread of COVID-19,” said Preeti Malani, MD, chief health officer at the University of Michigan. “The Community Surveillance and Tracking Program offers convenient testing to all members of the University of Michigan community.”

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.

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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