



NEWS RELEASE

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Media contact:
[Bob Wheaton](#)
517-281-1701

MDHHS reiterates importance of COVID-19 testing as more cases of B.1.1.7 variant detected at U-M and in Wayne County resident

LANSING, MICH. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is emphasizing the importance of COVID-19 testing with additional cases of the variant B.1.1.7 detected in a Wayne County resident and among people associated with the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Today MDHHS identified a variant case in an adult male who lives in Wayne County through a specimen sent to the department's Bureau of Laboratories. The laboratory also detected the variant in specimens from two adult females associated with the U-M, which previously had three B.1.1.7 cases identified.

B.1.1.7 spreads more easily between people, 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.

"The new variant is present in Michigan and we are at risk of seeing more spread of COVID-19. Everyone should do their part to end this pandemic. Get tested if you have been exposed, have symptoms, or have recently traveled to an area with a new variant spreading," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. "Make sure you are following all quarantine and isolation guidance. And do your part to prevent the spread of this virus by continuing to wear your mask, avoid gatherings, socially distance, and washing your hands."

Residents can find COVID-19 test sites in their communities at Michigan.gov/CoronavirusTest.

Symptoms may include: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headaches, loss of taste, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea.

Because the variant spreads more easily, it 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.

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

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 and CDC.gov/Coronavirus.

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