



NEWS RELEASE

STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

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COVID Variant Detected in MDOC Facility in Ionia Prisoners, staff to begin daily testing

IONIA, MICH. The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) has learned of the detection of the SARS-CoV-2, B.1.1.7 variant at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia.

This is the first known case of the variant inside a MDOC facility. After consultation with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), all prisoners and employees there will now be tested daily, rather than the weekly testing they have been conducting.

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 34 other states and jurisdictions in the U.S. As of Wednesday, Feb. 10, there were 61 cases in 11 jurisdictions in Michigan.

“The MDOC will be taking extra steps to identify where this variant is present amongst staff and the prisoner population and we will continue to do everything we can to keep the prisoners, our staff and the community safe,” MDOC Director Heidi Washington said.

Under an [Emergency Public Health order issued by MDHHS today](#), it requires daily testing of all employees at a facility where an outbreak of special concern has been declared for at least 14 days.

This new testing regimen will consist of a daily rapid antigen test. If a test result comes back positive, then a PCR test will be taken and sent to the state lab for testing for the variant. This will also apply to certain prisoners and staff at Duane Waters Health Center and Macomb Correctional Facility.

Prior to the detection of the variant at IBC, several prisoners who tested positive for COVID-19 were transferred to Duane Waters Health Center and Macomb Correctional Facility. The department has designated COVID positive facilities to address COVID positive prisoners with health risk factors that may place them at higher risk for hospitalization or negative outcomes.

Those prisoners will also be subject to the daily testing, as well as all prisoners and staff in the COVID positive unit at Duane Waters Health Center and Macomb Correctional Facility. 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:

- Wash hands often.
- Wear a mask around others.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others.
- Ventilate indoor spaces.
- Make a plan to get the vaccine when the opportunity becomes available.

Information around this outbreak is 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). To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit [Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine](https://www.michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine).

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