



NEWS RELEASE

STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

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MDHHS Identifies First Michigan Case of New COVID-19 Variant B.1.351 in Jackson County

LANSING, MICH. The first Michigan case of the COVID-19 variant B.1.351 was identified in a male child living in Jackson County by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Bureau of Laboratories today, Monday, March 8. Case investigation is currently underway to determine close contacts and if there are additional cases associated with this case.

Originally detected in early October 2020 in South Africa, B.1.351 shares some mutations with B.1.1.7. Cases caused by this variant were reported in the United States at the end of January 2021. B.1.351 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. Scientists are still evaluating how well COVID-19 vaccines work against this new variant.

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 20 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.

"We are concerned about the discovery of another variant in Michigan, although it was not unexpected," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. "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. We all have a personal responsibility to slow the spread of COVID-19 and end this pandemic as quickly as possible."

Based on available evidence, current tests can identify COVID-19 in these cases. The available COVID-19 vaccines also work against this new variant. Protective actions that prevent the spread of COVID-19 will also prevent the spread of both identified variants in Michigan, B.1.1.7 and B.1.351. Michiganders should:

- Get vaccinated for COVID-19.
- Wear a mask around others.
- Stay six 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-CoV-

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2. 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.1.351.

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.

As of March 8, Michigan has also identified 516 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant in 23 Michigan jurisdictions.

Information changes frequently regarding the outbreak and vaccine updates. For the most current information, visit the Jackson County Health Department webpage located at [Jackson County Health Department COVID vaccine webpage](#) or its [Facebook page](#).

Jackson County vaccine updates are also available by calling the COVID Vaccine Information Line at 517-817-4469.

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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