



NEWS RELEASE

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Illinois Department of Public Health Monitoring New Coronavirus Variant

State Is Increasing Surveillance For New Variant

SPRINGFIELD – A new variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 has been identified in the United Kingdom. Cases have been reported in two states and are not known to be linked to travel, which could indicate community spread. No cases caused by this new variant have been confirmed in Illinois yet. As more information is learned, IDPH will provide updates and notify the public if/when the variant is detected in Illinois. Illinois is increasing its surveillance for the variant by performing genomic sequence testing on an increased number of specimens that have been collected.

“Viruses are constantly changing through mutation and variant virus are expected,” said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “At this time, we have no evidence that infections by this variant cause more severe disease or death. However, early study shows the variant may spread more easily and quickly. We will continue to work with academic partners, laboratory researchers, physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor for cases.”

Virus mutation is common and can emerge and disappear quickly. Some mutations can emerge that help a virus spread more easily, cause infection to be more or less severe, or lead to resistance to treatments or vaccines. Based on the information available now, the effectiveness of the vaccine has not changed.

Public health experts are working to better understand the potential impact of this variant, including how the variant spreads and how it affects people who are infected. The same measures that have helped protect Illinoisans from COVID-19 will also help protect residents from the variant. Wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, avoiding crowds, ventilating indoor spaces, and washing hands frequently remain the best tools for preventing the spread of this virus, no matter the strain.

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