

First Case of B.1.351 COVID-19 Variant in Illinois

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) today announced the first case of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) variant B.1.351, which was first identified in South Africa. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the variant in a Rock Island resident. Illinois is currently reporting 22 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant, first identified in the United Kingdom.

“We expected to see more cases of variants detected in Illinois, including the B.1.351 strain,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “These variants seem to spread more

rapidly, which can lead to more cases of COVID-19 and even another surge. Our best path to defeating this virus as quickly as possible remains wearing our masks and getting vaccinated when it's our turn.”

“Having this new variant in our community underscores the need to take personal precautions to prevent further spread. Please continue to wear your mask when away from home, watch your distance when around others and wash your hands frequently,” said Rock Island County Health Department Administrator Nita Ludwig.

Cases of the B.1.351 were first reported in the U.S. at the end of January. So far, studies suggest that antibodies generated through the current COVID-19 vaccines recognize these variants and may offer some protection. Additional studies are underway.

IDPH will continue to work with local health departments, academic partners, laboratories, and CDC to monitor for cases. IDPH has increased its surveillance for this and other variants using genomic sequence testing on an increased number of specimens.

Viruses constantly change and new variants are expected. In addition to the B.1.1.7 and B.1.351 variants, the P.1 variant has emerged in Brazil.

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.

COVID-19 vaccine information and data can be found on the IDPH website at <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccine-faq>.