



Chisago County Health and Human Services Public Health Division



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(01/25/21)

New COVID-19 Variants

****MEDIA ADVISORY****

Viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. Multiple variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 have been documented in the United States and globally during this pandemic. This variant was first detected in September 2020 and is now highly prevalent in London and southeast England. It has since been detected in numerous countries around the world, including the United States and Canada.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) identified a new variant strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus -identified by genomic sequencing in positive specimens from five residents of four different counties in the Twin Cities metro area. Currently, the variant strain has not been identified in Chisago County. "It's important to note that this variant strain of the virus has been found in other states in the U.S., so we were expecting to find the virus in Minnesota. Knowing that it is now here does not change our current public health recommendations," said State Epidemiologist Ruth Lynfield.

At this point, experts believe the U.K. variant still makes up less than 1% of cases in the U.S. But, because it's more contagious, experts believe it'll spread more quickly to become the dominant strain in the U.S. by March. Although, health officials said it is still too early to know what kind of impact this variant strain may have in Minnesota. Currently, there is no evidence that these variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death. However, an increase in the number of cases will put more strain on health care resources, lead to more hospitalizations, and potentially more deaths. Public Health is encouraging residents to stay vigilant and continue to take all necessary measures to stay safe and protect others.

With current research, experts believe the available vaccines will protect against the U.K. variant. Chisago County continues vaccinations at a pace driven by the vaccine distribution to our county. At this point in time, public health does not know week to week what the vaccine supply will be, but are working diligently on planning and administering the vaccine throughout the county.