

COVID-19 UK Variant VOC-202012/01 – UK Variant

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Where did this variant come from?

A new variant of SARS-CoV-2, called 'VOC-202012/01' or lineage B.1.1.7, was recently identified in the United Kingdom (UK). The variant was detected after the UK observed a rapid increase in COVID-19 notification rates in late September 2020.

2. What is a virus variant?

Viruses are known to mutate over time, which creates a different variant (strain) of the same virus. Potential differences in variants could include increased/decreased transmissibility, and ability to cause milder/more severe disease.

3. Is this variant more transmissible or contagious?

- Early modelling suggests that this strain may be up to 70% more transmissible (contagious). Contact tracing and specific laboratory testing in the UK suggests that the secondary attack rate (the number of contacts of a COVID-19 case that become positive) may be higher for cases with VOC-202012/01 compared to cases with other variants (15.1% vs 9.8%).
- The new variant has been identified primarily among individuals younger than 60 years of age in the UK; however, there has been a large outbreak recently in a long-term care home in Barrie, Ontario.
- At this time, there is no clear evidence to suggest that existing variants of COVID-19 are more likely to cause severe disease.

4. How are cases of the variant identified?

The Public Health Lab in Ontario continues to analyse test results to identify cases of the variant as well as other variants that may be emerging. This is just one more reason why getting tested for COVID-19 is so important. HPEPH continues to work with the Public Health labs and the province to make sure surveillance of this variant continues locally.

5. How can I help stop the spread of the variant?

HPEPH continues to discourage any non-essential travel outside of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (HPEC), as well as close contact with others from outside of the region. All residents should comply with current provincial restrictions, including requirements to stay home as much as possible and avoid any non-essential travel. If you suspect you have been in contact with a case of COVID-19, or you are experiencing symptoms of the virus (even if mild), seek testing and isolate until your test results are received (or longer, if required).

6. How many cases do we have right now of this variant in Ontario?

As of January 27, 2021, 51 confirmed cases of the UK variant have been identified in Ontario however due to everchanging testing and data this number is likely to increase quickly. One case of this variant was also discovered recently in the KFL&A Public Health area and it is important to note that the full extent of the community spread of this variant is not totally understood at this time.

7. What is HPEPH doing to protect residents against the variant?

We are reviewing the provincial guidance about strengthening measures we know work like identifying high risk contacts and more intense outbreak management if a variant occurs in a high-risk setting like a long-term care home or workplace. We are also ensuring there is frequent testing of residents and staff in long-term care and retirement homes to identify and prevent the spread of cases.

Current provincial restrictions require that residents avoid any unnecessary travel outside of the region. HPEPH will continue to monitor rates of COVID-19, including variants, throughout the province, and will respond as necessary in order to protect the residents of HPEC.

8. How do we protect ourselves against this variant?

Continue to follow Public Health guidelines on handwashing, physical distancing, wearing a mask and staying home as much as possible, only leaving for essential reasons, like getting groceries or attending a medical appointment. Do not have contact with any other households unless for essential reasons, like providing care for a loved one, providing child care, or if you live alone, joining with one other household. Avoid any unnecessary travel outside of the region. If you believe you have come in contact with someone with COVID-19 or if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 (even mild) please get tested. It is the best way to identify possible cases of COVID-19 including this variant and help stop the spread to others.

Sources:

[Public Health Ontario UK Variant Synthesis, December 2020](#),

[Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, January 2021](#)

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