COVID-19 Variants

COVID-19 is caused by a virus. It is normal and expected for viruses to mutate (change). The changed virus can be spread and may continue to mutate as it moves from person to person.

When there have been several significant mutations to the virus then it is called a variant.

When a variant affects disease spread, disease severity, the tests used to detect the virus, and /or vaccines and treatments, then it is referred to as a "variant of concern".

COVID-19 variants of concern have been identified in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil. They have since been found in many other countries around the world, including Canada. Learn more about the current COVID-19 variants of concern at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html .

What We Know Now

Work is underway around the world by scientists and public health communities to better understand these variants. Early findings include the following:

- **These are variants of concern because they spread more easily than the original virus.**

- The variants may affect the severity of disease.

- Research is underway to understand how the current vaccines help protect against the variants.

- The variants can be detected using current testing methods.

- There is concern about the impact on our communities if these variants become common. The increased spread of COVID-19 would result in more illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

- Symptoms are the same as the usual COVID-19, including cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or other symptoms.

Reduce Your Risk & Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

While the new COVID-19 variants seem to spread more easily, they are thought to spread in the same way as the usual virus. This means that the same types of preventive measures will be effective.

To protect yourself and those around you, **follow all public health guidance**, including:
- staying home when sick
- avoiding gatherings
- practicing physical distancing
- wearing a mask
- washing your hands
- following all public health measures in effect – for current public health measures refer to https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx

These are all critical steps to preventing the spread of the virus, regardless of what strain it is.

Isolation & Quarantine

Remember to isolate immediately if you develop any of the COVID-19 symptoms. Contact your local Health Centre, or call Health Link at 811 to arrange for testing.

You will be notified if you test positive for a COVID-19 variant. **Household contacts need to stay at home in quarantine until 14 days have passed from the end of the case's isolation period, which is 10 days**. This means, household contacts that stay at home, need to quarantine for 24 days. This is necessary to prevent spread into the community. **Follow all instructions from your local public health team.**

For more information on isolation and quarantine refer to https://www.alberta.ca/isolation.aspx .

If you cannot isolate or quarantine safely in your own home, supports are available. Speak to a representative from the local Health Centre. There may also be an option to isolate or quarantine in a hotel room. For more information on the hotel isolation program refer to https://open.alberta.ca/publications/covid-19-information-people-required-isolate-quarantine-hotel

For up to date information on COVID-19 variants of concern refer to the following websites:
Government of Canada - https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a8
Alberta Health Services - https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17381.aspx
Alberta Health - https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx
Indigenous Services Canada - https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581964230816/1581964277298

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