

For Immediate Release
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B.1.1.7 Variant of SARS-CoV-2 Virus Identified in Grand Traverse County

Through routine surveillance performed by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Laboratories, two cases of the B.1.1.7 variant of COVID-19 were identified in Grand Traverse County residents. Initial and follow up case investigations and contact tracing have been completed for these cases and their contacts. A 14-day quarantine - without the option of ending quarantine early - is required for any close contacts of individuals who have been infected with the variant.

Grand Traverse County Health Department (GTCHD) is urging individuals to continue to take precautions against COVID-19, especially as new variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 become more prevalent. **These important precautions include:**

- Get vaccinated for COVID-19 when available and eligible.
- Wear a mask around others.
- Stay six feet apart from others.
- Wash your hands often.
- Ventilate indoor spaces.
- Stay home from work, school, and other social events if feeling ill or awaiting test results.

Due to confirmation of the variant in our community, Grand Traverse County Health Department urges anyone with any Covid-like symptoms to get tested. The key to stopping the spread is through immediate testing, isolation, quarantine and contact tracing. Efforts to slow transmission will allow for more of our population to be protected through vaccination.

The B.1.1.7 variant was first identified in Great Britain and is the result of mutations to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the virus that causes COVID-19. Research shows that the B.1.1.7 variant is approximately 50% more easily spread than other variants, however there is no indication that it affects clinical outcomes or disease severity. In addition, at this time, there is no evidence that vaccines are less effective against the B.1.1.7 variant.

The first Michigan case of the B.1.1.7 variant was identified in Washtenaw County in January. As of 3/28/21, Michigan has 1,237 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant, surpassed only by Florida at 2,274 cases.

GTCHD continues to distribute COVID-19 vaccine to eligible individuals who live or work in Grand Traverse County. It will still take some time to vaccinate everyone, so individuals are encouraged to be patient and follow the virus protection precautions.

Additional information regarding COVID-19 variants can be found here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/index.html>

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