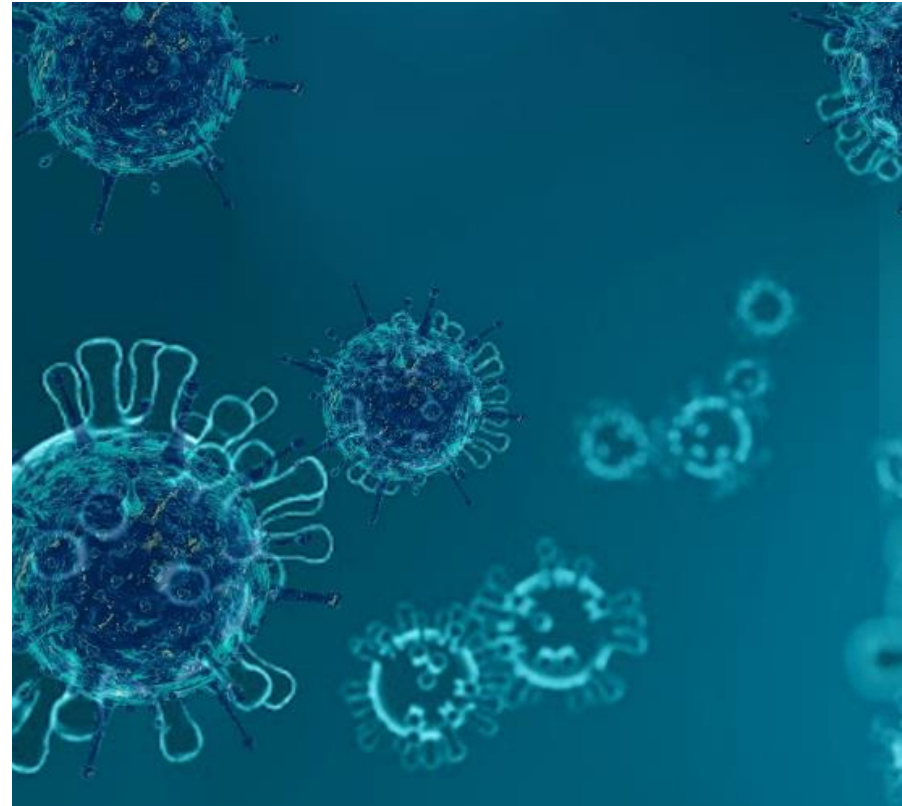


SARS-CoV-2: New Variant of Concern

Brandy Darby, DVM, MPH
Veterinary Epidemiologist
Virginia Department of Health
brandy.darby@vdh.virginia.gov

Background

- Viruses constantly change through genetic mutation
- Most mutations have no impact on virus functionality
- Coronaviruses have spike proteins that influence how the virus behaves



What We Know

- In November 2020, the United Kingdom reported a rapid increase in cases of COVID-19 in London and southeast England
- This increase was linked to a new genetic variant of the virus identified with whole genome sequencing (WGS)
- Caused changes to the spike protein and other parts of the virus

What We Know

- The new variant might spread more easily from person-to-person
- **The variant does not appear to cause more severe disease or death than the previous circulating strain**
- Public health recommendations for slowing the spread—wearing masks, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, avoiding crowds, ventilating indoor spaces, and washing hands often—will also prevent the spread of this variant

Is the new variant in the U.S.?

- Yes, the new variant has been identified through WGS efforts in several states
 - CO, CA, FL, GA, NY
- Not all positive cases of COVID-19 are sequenced - more cases could be in the U.S. that have not been identified yet through surveillance efforts
- To date, DCLS has not identified this particular variant in the samples sequenced in Virginia

What Are We Doing About It?

- CDC:
 - Monitoring the situation and working with U.S. and global partners
- VDH:
 - Monitoring the impact on immunity and testing
 - Collaboration with DCLS to perform genetic surveillance for changes to SARS-CoV-2
 - Clinician letter to healthcare providers to share information about the new variant and travel requirements for travelers coming from the U.K.

Additional Reading

- CDC Scientific brief: [Implications of the Emerging SARS-CoV-2 Variant VUI 202012/01](#)
- CDC Scientific brief: [Emerging SARS-CoV-2 Variants](#)
- CDC Consumer web page: [New Variant of Virus that Causes COVID-19 Detected](#)
- CDC Consumer web page: [Requirement for Proof of Negative COVID-19 Test Required for Passengers Arriving from the UK](#)