SARS-CoV-2: New Variant of Concern

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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](#)