

B.1.1.7 Update – January 27, 2021

B.1.1.7 variant of the COVID-19 Virus

The B.1.1.7 variant, also known as the “UK” variant, was identified in the United Kingdom in the fall of 2020. It has changes in its genetic code that make it different than the virus seen in Canada until recently. Cases of COVID-19 caused by B.1.1.7 have been found in Ontario in the last few weeks.

Where it is in Ontario?

As of January 26, 2021 there were cases of COVID-19 variant B.1.1.7 reported in 8 different public health units: York, Durham, Peel, Toronto, KFLA (Kingston Frontenac Lennox Addington), Middlesex-London, Simcoe-Muskoka and Ottawa.

Why does this matter?

The B.1.1.7 variant spreads more easily from person to person than other strains of COVID-19. That means that more people can become infected with this variant in a short period of time. Early information from the United Kingdom suggests that it is possible that the B.1.1.7 variant can make people sicker than other types of the COVID-19 virus, and more people will need to be hospitalized while infected. This has been seen in the United Kingdom.

Will the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines be effective with this variant?

Both companies have done testing with their vaccines and have stated that they are effective against the B.1.1.7 variant.

What can we do about it?

Consistently practicing good public health measures are even more important to protect communities from B.1.1.7:

- Limit close contact with others
- Limit interactions with others and unnecessary trips
- Maintain physical distance, wear a well-fitting 3-ply mask and wash/clean your hands frequently
- Avoid closed spaces, crowded places, and non-essential travel
- stay away from others if you feel sick and get tested, or have been asked to self-isolate
- Please follow all public health advice and stay alert for updates to recommendations as we learn more about B.1.1.7