



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Evidence for B.1.1.7 Coronavirus Variant found In Whatcom County**

**Bellingham, WA** - Whatcom County Health Department was notified yesterday afternoon by the Washington State Department of Health that the first confirmed case of the COVID-19 virus variant B.1.1.7, commonly known as the U.K. variant, had been detected in a Whatcom County resident.

"We are concerned but not alarmed about the detection of this variant in Whatcom County," said Dr. Greg Stern, Whatcom County Health Officer. "It has been present in other counties in our region for several weeks, and we expected that it would eventually be identified in Whatcom County as well."

This variant transmits infection more effectively than the original strain. There is some recent evidence from the U.K. that this variant may increase the risk of hospitalization or death, but those findings have not yet been confirmed.

"We expect this variant will continue to spread over the next several months," said Stern. "We're encouraged that the current vaccines work well to protect against it."

The two vaccines authorized for use in the U.S., Moderna and Pfizer, have not shown decreased effectiveness with this variant. Vaccine supply is currently limited even for those who are now eligible, but supplies are expected to increase in the coming weeks.

Because this variant is more easily transmitted, measures that reduce or prevent transmission are even more important:

- Wear a close-fitting mask in public and with anyone outside the household. Masks should cover both nose and mouth and have multiple layers.
- Avoid indoor social gatherings. If gathering indoors, wear a mask and keep windows and doors open to maximize ventilation.
- Wash hands often or use hand sanitizer when water and soap are not available.

- Sign up for Washington Exposure Notifications (also known as WA Notify), a free tool that works through smartphones without sharing any personal information and alerts users if they may have been exposed to COVID-19.

“The measures we have been taking to slow the spread of COVID-19 -- wearing masks, washing hands, watching our distance -- are effective against this variant,” said Stern. “It’s even more important now to diligently take these preventive steps as we wait for more vaccine.”

COVID-19 Variants (DOH)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/Variants>

About Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19 (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html>

Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/mask-fit-and-filtration.html>

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