Public Health Officials Announce First Identification of South Africa COVID Variant in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced the first case of the B.1.351 COVID-19 variant identified in the Commonwealth. Genetic sequencing completed at the Broad Institute on behalf of DPH has confirmed the variant, which was originally identified in South Africa.

The case is a female in her 20s who resides in Middlesex County; she has had no reported travel.

The B.1.351 variant is known to spread easily. The Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory is working in collaboration with many healthcare and academic partners to quickly identify variants of concern by sequencing a subset of positive samples.

Two other variants of concern are the B.1.1.7 originally found in the United Kingdom, and the P.1 variant, which was originally detected in Brazil. Currently, there are 34 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant in Massachusetts; there are no confirmed cases of the P.1.

The best defense against a rapid rise in cases from variants of concern is to prevent the spread of COVID.

New information from CDC shows that improving the fit and filtration of masks helps reduce the spread of the virus. Mask fit can be improved by using a mask with a nose wire and by using a mask fitter or by knotting the ear loops and tucking the sides. Mask filtration is improved by using multiple layers. Learn more about how to use masks to protect yourself

and others at Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19 | CDC.

Other critical public health measures to help prevent the spread of COVID include social distancing (staying 6 feet away from others), avoiding groups, staying home when you are sick, getting tested if you have symptoms or are identified as a close contact of someone with COVID, and getting vaccinated when it is your turn.

Learn more about variants of concern at New Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19 | CDC and track their presence in both Massachusetts and the US at US COVID-19 Cases Caused by Variants | CDC.