

For Immediate Release

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COVID-19 Variant in Washtenaw County

Washtenaw County Health Department alerts public to possible exposures; encourages testing

YPSILANTI, Mich., Jan 23, 2021 – Cases of the COVID-19 variant B117 have been identified in Washtenaw County. A total of 5 cases of the variant have been identified and additional sequencing continues for other possible cases already positive for COVID-19. Washtenaw County Health Department is now aware of a possible public exposure. Brief, public exposures are not normally a COVID-19 exposure concern but the B117 variant is more easily transmitted and could lead to more cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

As a precaution, the Health Department recommends immediate COVID-19 testing for anyone in the following locations at the specific times provided.

- Sun, Jan 17 at the Meijer on Ann Arbor Saline Rd., Ann Arbor MI from 9:00 to 10:00 am
- Sun, Jan 17 Briarwood Mall, 100 Briarwood Circle, Ann Arbor MI from 1:00 to 2:00 pm

Everyone should be aware of this new variant and limit any possible exposures to COVID-19. This includes not gathering with people outside of your household and limiting more risky behaviors where social distancing and wearing masks cannot be consistently done. Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19, has been recently exposed, or who has recently traveled to a place where a new variant is circulating should be tested.

“The possibility of additional spread of the variant is a concern,” says Juan Luis Marquez, MD, MPH, medical director with Washtenaw County Health Department. “At this point and with the guidance of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, we are encouraging extra precautions. Seek testing if you have symptoms, have recently been exposed to COVID-19, or have recently traveled to a place where the new variant is circulating. And everyone should make sure they are using all COVID-19 precautions consistently. This includes face masks, social distancing, hand cleaning, avoiding crowds or gatherings, and following isolation and quarantine guidance.”

The initial case of the B117 variant was identified on Jan 16 in the University of Michigan community. It is not clear if all subsequent cases are connected to this first case. Washtenaw County Health Department, MDHHS and the university are working closely to implement additional containment strategies to slow the spread of the variant.

“We have been warning people for weeks that this variant would likely be identified in the State of Michigan,” says Dr Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. “We want everyone to understand that this variant is much more easily transmitted, and there is increased risk of rapid spread. Now is the time for people to take additional precautions and limit

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any potential exposures. Wear your mask, wash your hands, avoid gatherings, and make an appointment for a vaccine when it's your turn. We all have a role to play in ending this pandemic.”

COVID-19 Testing

Washtenaw County Health Department is working with the Michigan Department of Health and local partners to provide additional, no-cost COVID-19 testing opportunities. Testing will be available this Sun, Jan 24 from 12:00 to 5:00 pm at Pioneer High School 601 W. Stadium Blvd, Ann Arbor, MI. [Pre-registration](#) is available but not required. Ongoing testing options are listed at www.washtenaw.org/covid19test or by using the [statewide COVID-19 test locator](#).

Faster spread of COVID-19 illness is a serious concern because the number of people sickened increases so more may become seriously ill or die. Prevent transmission whenever possible. Residents are strongly encouraged to use all effective prevention strategies.

- Wear a face mask around others
- Keep at least 6 feet apart from others
- Clean hands frequently
- Avoid crowded areas or gatherings
- Ventilate indoor spaces if around others
- Seek [testing](#) if ill, exposed, or after travel
- Follow [isolation or quarantine](#) guidance if ill, exposed, or waiting on test results
- Get vaccinated when vaccine becomes available to you

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [New COVID-19 Variants](#)

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) [News Releases](#)

Washtenaw County Health Department www.washtenaw.org/covid19

Washtenaw County Health Department

The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community, including responding to health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs. Visit us at washtenaw.org/health or call 734-544-6700.

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