Eight New Cases of COVID-19 Variant Reported in Illinois

News – Monday, January 25, 2021

CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) today announced eight additional Illinois cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) variant B.1.1.7, first identified in the United Kingdom. Health officials previously announced a single case of the variant in Chicago on January 15, for a total of nine cases that have now been reported in Illinois. The nine cases range in age from 12 to 63 years and live in Cook County, including Chicago. Specimens testing positive for the variant through genomic sequencing were collected between December 29, 2020 – January 15, 2021.

"With reports of this variant already in many states in the U.S., we anticipated its spread here in Illinois," said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. "Early studies have found that this variant spreads more easily than what we have seen with the current prevailing variant. We are following closely to see if there is evidence that infections by this variant cause more severe disease or death. Based on the information available now, the vaccine will still be effective. Continued masking and vaccination when it is your turn remain our best path to defeating this virus as quickly as possible."

"We expected to see more cases of this variant crop up, and people should know that the best way to protect themselves is continue wearing a mask, washing hands often, staying six feet away from others and getting vaccinated when it is your turn," said CDPH Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D. "CDPH is working closely with the CDC and IDPH to contribute to national SARS-CoV-2 strain surveillance, and building regional capacity and coordination for this more advanced, specialized molecular laboratory public health work is a top priority."

IDPH will continue to work with local health departments, academic partners, laboratories, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor for cases. IDPH has increased its surveillance for this and other variants by performing genomic sequence testing on an increased number of specimens.

Viruses constantly change and new variants are expected. In addition to the B.1.1.7 variant, another variant, 1.351 has emerged in South Africa, and another, P.1 in Brazil.

Public health experts are working to better understand the potential impact of this variant, including how the variant spreads and how it affects people who are infected. The same measures that have helped protect Illinoisans from COVID-19 will also help protect residents from the variant. Wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, avoiding crowds, ventilating indoor spaces, and washing hands frequently remain the best tools for preventing the spread of this virus, no matter the

strain.

COVID-19 vaccine information and data can be found on the IDPH website at **https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccine-faq**.

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