



**LAC DPH Health Advisory:
SARS-CoV-2 Virus Variant**

December 24, 2020



This message is intended for all healthcare providers and laboratorians in Los Angeles County.

Please distribute as appropriate.

Key Messages

- A new SARS CoV-2 variant strain has been reported in the United Kingdom.
- While the SARS-CoV-2 virus mutates regularly, the rapid rise in prevalence of this strain in parts of the UK is concerning.
- At this time, there is no evidence that this variant is associated with increased disease severity or that COVID-19 vaccines will offer less protection against this variant.
- LAC DPH is asking laboratories to assist with surveillance to detect the variant strain and to report any occurrence to LAC DPH Public Health Laboratory.

Situation

A new variant strain of SARS-CoV-2 that contains a series of mutations has been described in the United Kingdom (UK) and become highly prevalent in London and southeast England. Although more study is needed, based on these mutations, this variant strain may be more rapidly transmissible than other circulating strains of SARS-CoV-2.

Scientists are working to learn more about this variant to better understand how easily it might be transmitted and whether currently authorized vaccines will protect people against it. At this time, there is no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness or increased risk of death or that available vaccines will not be as effective. Information regarding the virologic, epidemiologic, and clinical characteristics of the variant are rapidly emerging.

CDC, in collaboration with other public health agencies, is monitoring the situation closely and will communicate new information as it becomes available

This variant, referred to as "SARS-CoV-2 VOC 202012/01" or "B.1.17" has not yet been identified through sequencing efforts in the United States. However, as most US infections have not been sequenced, the variant could already be in the United States without having been detected.

For more information, see CDC's [Implications of the Emerging SARS-CoV-2 Variant VOC 202012/01](#).

Action Steps for Laboratories

- Review recent SARS-CoV-2 PCR data from December to look for the following gene detection pattern: ORF1ab positive, N gene positive, S gene negative. Note: Review of this particular molecular data pattern is assay specific. Lack of detection for the S gene for SARS-CoV-2 VOC 202012/01 or B.1.17 is only applicable for some molecular

assays that target the S gene (spike). If your assay targets S gene, review your recent lab positivity rates relative to community rates and discuss assay performance with your vendor technical support.

- Begin to flag any prospective occurrence of any unusual molecular patterns.
- Report any instances of suspect SARS-COV2 variants from molecular testing or whole genome sequencing to the LAC DPH Public Health Laboratory (PHL). Call 562-658-1330 and ask for the Public Health Laboratory Director, Dr. Nicole Green.
- If residual specimen is available, submit the specimen to the PHL for sequencing and further characterization. Include relevant patient history and a copy of the specimen report. Provide molecular assay CT values when applicable.

Visit the LAC DPH COVID-19 Provider [website](#) for up-to-date resources and guidance
Refresh your browser to view the latest versions. publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/

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