Washburn County Health Department
Washburn County Health and Human Services Department
P.O. Box 250, 304 2nd Street Shell Lake, WI 54871
Phone: 715-635-4400 | co.washburn.wi.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 03/31/2021

COVID-19 Variant B.1.1.7 Identified in Washburn County

The Washburn County Health Department was notified that a Washburn County resident recently tested positive for the COVID-19 variant B.1.1.7, the variant originally discovered in the United Kingdom. Researchers believe that the B.1.1.7 variant is more infectious, spreading faster and easier, than the original strain of the virus causing COVID-19.

Viruses change through mutation and new variants are expected to occur over time as the virus continues to spread. Multiple variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the virus that causes COVID-19, have been documented in the United States and globally. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and its laboratory partners are collaborating with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct SARS-CoV-2 Strain Surveillance to monitor for the presence of variant strains in Wisconsin.

Over 70 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant have been found in Wisconsin. Because this variant is believed to spread more easily, it is critical that practices to slow the spread are continued. A higher rate of transmission could lead to more cases, which would increase the number of people overall who need clinical care. It may also impact the number of those needing to be vaccinated to fully disrupt community transmission.

While we are making progress with vaccination, only 36.6% of Washburn County residents have received at least one dose of vaccine and 21.8% have completed the vaccination series. It will take time to vaccinate all eligible individuals and work towards herd immunity.

To help keep our community safe, the Washburn County Health Department urges you to:

- Wear a mask or face covering, even after the statewide mask mandate has ended
- Practice physical distancing
- Avoid large gatherings
- Practice good hand hygiene by washing hands frequently or using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol
- If you are sick, isolate yourself as much as possible and get tested
- If you test positive, work with your Local Health Department when they call you
- Get vaccinated when you become eligible

Visit https://www.co.washburn.wi.us/news/public-health/Coronavirus-Outbreak for general COVID-19 information. Visit https://www.co.washburn.wi.us/news/public-health/COVID-19-Vaccine for COVID-19 vaccine information.