



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**This is an official  
MS Health Alert Network (HAN) Alert**

**MESSAGE ID:** MSHAN-20210215-00500-ALT (Health Alert)  
**RECIPIENTS:** All Physicians, Hospitals, ERs, ICPs, NPs, and  
Healthcare Providers – Statewide  
Monday, February 15, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Identification of First B.1.1.7 SARS-CoV-2 Variant  
Strain in Mississippi

Dear Colleagues,

The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) is reporting the detection of the B.1.1.7 “UK variant” in a Mississippi resident; this represents the first SARS-CoV-2 variant strain (the virus that causes COVID-19) identified in the state. To date, over 1,000 cases of B.1.1.7 variant strains have been identified in 40 US states; additionally, B.1.351 (17 cases) and P.1 (3 cases) variant strains have been identified in the US to a lesser degree.

The B.1.1.7 strain in Mississippi was identified in sample collected in late January. No international travel or spread to contacts is known to have occurred, however additional investigation is ongoing.

B.1.1.7 variant strains are known to be more infectious and spread more easily. Evidence suggests that the currently available vaccines will produce antibodies that recognize the identified variant strains, but additional studies are underway. There is no direct evidence that the B.1.1.7 strain leads to a higher risk of severe infection or death; however, increased cases could lead to more hospitalizations, additional strain on healthcare resources, and ultimately more deaths.

MSDH is expanding the intensity and geographic scope of surveillance for variant strains in the state. It is likely additional variant strains will be identified among Mississippi residents.

Mississippi Providers and laboratories are asked to assist with the following:

1. Continue to strongly recommend wearing a mask, social distancing, avoiding large gatherings and frequent hand hygiene;
2. Continue to recommend vaccination. Currently, Mississippi residents and persons who work in Mississippi are eligible for COVID-19 vaccine who are:
  - a. Persons aged 65 years and older;
  - b. Persons aged 16-64 years with certain underlying conditions,
  - c. Healthcare personnel,
  - d. Or Residents of a long-term care facility.
  - e. For eligibility criteria see [COVID-19 Vaccination Sites, Eligibility and Appointments - Mississippi State Department of Health \(ms.gov\)](#)

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3. Report to the Office of Epidemiology (601-576-7725) and submit PCR samples for genomic sequencing to the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory (MPHL), any individuals with:
  - a. Suspected Re-infection-Individuals with a positive COVID-19 RNA test  $\geq 90$  days after the initial laboratory confirmed infection, whether symptomatic or not. MSDH is interested in conducting genomic sequencing at the MPHL even if there are not paired respiratory specimens available (i.e., respiratory sample from the initial infection is not available).
  - b. Suspected vaccine failures-Fully vaccinated individuals with a positive viral test (antigen or PCR)  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine (only PCR samples are requested for submission to MPHL for genomic sequencing).
  - c. Additional communication with laboratories is ongoing to identify additional samples of interest to conduct surveillance for variant strains.

As always, please contact the MSDH Office of Epidemiology with questions at 601-576-7725.

Regards,

Paul Byers, MD  
State Epidemiologist



***Alerting Message Specification Settings***

**Originating Agency:** Mississippi State Department of Health  
**Alerting Program:** MS Health Alert Network (MS HAN)  
**Message Identifier:** MSHAN-20210215-00500-ALT  
**Program (HAN) Type:** Health Alert  
**Status (Type):** Actual ()  
**Message Type:** Alert  
**Reference:** MSHAN-00500  
**Severity:** Unknown  
**Acknowledgement:** No  
**Sensitive:** Not Sensitive  
**Message Expiration:** Undetermined  
**Urgency:** Undetermined  
**Delivery Time:** 600 minutes

**Definition of Alerting Vocabulary and Message Specification Settings**

**Originating Agency:** A unique identifier for the agency originating the alert.

**Alerting Program:** The program sending the alert or engaging in alerts and communications using PHIN Communication and Alerting (PCA) as a vehicle for their delivery.

**Message Identifier:** A unique alert identifier that is generated upon alert activation (MSHAN-yyymmdd-hhmm-TTT (**ALT=Health Alert, ADV=Health Advisory, UPD=Health Update, MSG/INFO=Message/Info Service**)).

**Program (HAN) Type:** Categories of Health Alert Messages.

**Health Alert:** Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

**Health Info Service:** Provides Message / Notification of general public health information; unlikely to require immediate action.

**Status (Type):**

- Actual: Communication or alert refers to a live event
- Exercise: Designated recipients must respond to the communication or alert
- Test: Communication or alert is related to a technical, system test and should be disregarded



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**Message Type:**

Alert: Indicates an original Alert  
Update: Indicates prior alert has been Updated and/or superseded  
Cancel: Indicates prior alert has been cancelled  
Error: Indicates prior alert has been retracted

**Reference:** For a communication or alert with a Message Type of “Update” or “Cancel”, this attribute contains the unique Message Identifier of the original communication or alert being updated or cancelled. “n/a” = Not Applicable.

**Severity:**

Extreme: Extraordinary threat to life or property  
Severe: Significant threat to life or property  
Moderate: Possible threat to life or property  
Minor: Minimal threat to life or property  
Unknown: Unknown threat to life or property

**Acknowledgement:** Indicates whether an acknowledgement on the part of the recipient is required to confirm that the alert was received, and the timeframe in which a response is required (Yes or No).

**Sensitive:**

Sensitive: Indicates the alert contains sensitive content  
Not Sensitive: Indicates non-sensitive content

**Message Expiration:**

Undetermined.

**Urgency:**

Undetermined. Responsive action should be taken immediately.

**Delivery Time:**

Indicates the timeframe for delivery of the alert (15, 60, 1440, 4320 minutes (.25, 1, 24, 72 hours)).