

COVID-19 variants of concern

About the variants

- The virus that causes COVID-19, like all viruses, is constantly changing. Globally, there are multiple COVID-19 variants of concern, most notably the following have been detected in Canada:
 - **B.1.1.7**: first identified in the United Kingdom and the most common variant in Canada currently
 - **B.1.351**: first identified in South Africa
 - **P.1**: first identified in Brazil
- They were initially imported via travel from outside the country. However, we are now seeing an increase in community spread of these variants of concern
- The Government of Canada continues to work with the provinces, territories and Indigenous partners to track and respond to these variants of concern
- Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) continues to:
 - review new research and information about the COVID-19 variants as they become available
 - provide updates

Contact tracing and testing

- The COVID-19 point of care tests cannot detect if a case of COVID-19 is caused by the original COVID-19 strain or the variants of concern. In order to test for variants, positive samples undergo sophisticated testing in provincial and national laboratories
- If an individual's sample is suspected or confirmed as a variant of concern, local public health authorities will contact that person about the next steps to be taken
- The absolute risk of death associated with the variants of concern remains relatively low. However, as the variants can spread more easily than the original COVID-19 strain, ISC strongly encourages actions are taken to ensure all possible close contacts of infected persons are identified. This will ensure timely detection of new cases and reduce the spread of transmission
- Local public health, First Nations community nursing stations and health centres will continue to work together to follow provincial or territorial guidelines for:
 - contact tracing
 - testing
 - isolation
 - other public health measures



Public health measures

- For First Nations communities, we recommend that people with presumptive or confirmed COVID-19 variants of concern who live with others in overcrowded or poorly ventilated housing:
 - isolate in alternative isolation accommodations when possible
 - insure that all household contacts wear medical masks indoors
- This is an important step to stop the variants of concern from spreading to other people in the household as well as the community. Individuals should follow their provincial or territorial advice on alternative isolation accommodations and isolation protocols
- Additional studies are needed to determine the optimal length of isolation for close contacts. This will be influenced by the circumstances of the exposure. Individuals should follow their provincial or territorial health authority's guidance for isolation or quarantine after COVID-19 exposure, including exposure to variants of concern
- Until a large number of people across Canada are vaccinated and we understand the virus following vaccination, everyone must continue to follow public health measures including:
 - washing your hands often
 - staying home when you're sick
 - maintaining physical distancing
 - wearing a face mask, even if you've been vaccinated

Related links

- [COVID-19 variants](#)
- [The Government of Canada invests \\$53 million to address COVID-19 virus variants of concern](#)

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