

2021-Mar-18

Re: COVID-19 Variants of Concern

Recently, new strains of the virus that causes COVID-19 have been identified in Saskatchewan. Some of these new strains are called variants of concern (VOC), because they spread more easily between people. Prince Albert Public Health has identified individual(s) in at least one school setting who have tested positive for a variant of concern. This is expected as there are VOC spreading across Saskatchewan, Canada and around the world.

Local public health officials have been working with school boards directly throughout the pandemic event when it comes to declaring outbreaks and supporting contact investigations. When determining who is a close contact of a confirmed case, whether a classroom of children should self-isolate or whether a school should go to an alternative level of instruction, VOC will be used as part of the risk assessment and guidance.

While early data suggest that these new variants may be more transmissible than the original strain, to date there is no evidence that these variants cause more severe disease symptoms; however, there is concern about the impact on our communities if such a COVID-19 variant virus became common. The increased spread of COVID-19 would result in more illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

Symptoms are the same as the usual COVID-19, including cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or other symptoms.

While the new COVID-19 VOC seems to spread more easily, they are believed to spread in the same way as the usual virus: droplets and aerosols from speaking, shouting, or singing, and transmission on hands and shared surfaces. The difference is that they are transmitted faster and more easily. The same types of preventive strategies will be effective and are critical steps to preventing the spread of the virus, regardless of what strain it is.

To protect yourself and those around you, follow all public health guidance, including:

- washing your hands
- wearing a mask
- practicing physical distancing
- staying home when sick
- get tested if you have any symptoms of COVID-19
- following all public health measures in effect

Saskatchewan recently started updating daily case counts and information about variants of concern and can be found on the provincial government's COVID-19 website (www.saskatchewan.ca/covid19).

I would like to use this opportunity and express the clear path to bring the pandemic under control with immunization. Overall, vaccination for COVID-19 will reduce virus transmission, including that of the variants of concern. The COVID 19 immunization campaign is underway, based on age as a main risk factor. As we move forward with bringing vaccination to all adults and with continued public health measures, I am optimistic that we will bring the pandemic under control.

Thank you for all that you are doing to keep our schools and communities safe.



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Healthy People, Healthy Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation,
acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

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