



### COVID-19 VARIANTS OF CONCERN UPDATE

- The number of COVID-19 variants of concern cases in Saskatchewan continues to increase significantly every day. View the latest case information [here](#)
- The majority of new cases in Saskatchewan are variants which means getting tested is more important than ever. The rising number of cases and rising number of those testing positive with a variant of concern are leading to increased demand for hospitalization and intensive care unit (ICU) services. ICUs are seeing increasing younger and sicker patients needing acute care and the number of patients in ICU is at an all-time high.
- Up until recently, the VOCs with lineages identified by whole genome sequencing in Saskatchewan, were the B.1.1.1.7 (UK) and the B.1.351 (SA). The newest variant that has shown up in Saskatchewan is the P.1. (Brazilian).
  - These are the first P.1 (Brazilian) variants detected in the province.
  - Preliminary data from Brazil is showing that this variant is 1.4-2.2 times more transmissible than the previously circulating strain\*
- Preliminary data on the B.1.1.7 UK VOC\* is indicating some very concerning information:
  - Up to 64% increased risk of hospitalization
  - Up to 100% increased risk of requiring ICU care
  - Up to 61% increased risk of death in Canada, Denmark and the UK

\*Provided by the COVID-19 Evidence Support Team's Rapid Review Report

### CLASSIFICATION OF VARIANTS\*

The World Health Organization has begun to create a classification system for mutations of interest. While a mutation refers to specific genetic changes, variants refer to the viruses containing the changes. Not all mutations are of significance or have clinical impacts. The WHO classifies variant viruses into two hierarchical classes:

- 1. Variants of Interest** - A variant that has specific genetic markers that have been associated with changes to receptor binding, reduced neutralization by antibodies generated against previous infection or vaccination, reduced efficacy of treatments, potential diagnostic impact, or predicted increase in transmissibility or disease severity
- 2. Variants of Concern** - A variant for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralizations by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures

\* Provided by the COVID-19 Evidence Support Team's Rapid Review Report



### SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Interest

*{Excluding Variants of Concern}*

Updated April 16, 2021

Variants of Interest	Reason for Interest	Identified in Saskatchewan
B.1.427	VOI declared USA (California)	1
B.1.429	VOI declared USA (California)	20
B.1.526	VOI declared USA (New York)	-
B.1.525	VOI declared USA (Nigeria)	1
P.2	NML watching (Brazil)	2
A.23.1	NML watching (Uganda)	1
P.3	NML watching (Philippines)	-
B.1.616	WHO watching (France)	-
B.1.617	WHO watching (India)	-
B.1.28 (P.3)	As per Pango version 2021-02-21 – if re-analyzed may be P.3	2

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Viruses change. They mutate and evolve. **The Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority continues to monitor ALL variants very closely and report them as they are discovered.**

But it means we need an even greater effort from the people of Saskatchewan. The variants have proven themselves to be more easily transmissible from person to person and they are more dangerous with more severe illness. Despite how tired everyone is, despite how challenging things are, we cannot ease up on public health measures; while the vaccine is being administered, we need everyone to continue to follow the Public Health Orders and guidelines – at a minimum – and to continue masking, washing our hand frequently, maintaining a physical distance of at least six feet or two metres and getting tested to protect yourself and those around you.