

A MESSAGE FROM THE HEALTH COMMISSIONER



Dear Community Members:

Each week of the pandemic seems to bring something new. This week is no exception. The Health Department was notified by the state lab that two cases of the coronavirus variant B.1.1.7, or the UK variant, were detected in Medina County. Both cases are contained and there is no evidence of additional spread.

What does this mean for Medina County?

Public health has closely monitored and watched the evolution of the virus since it first emerged. It was expected a variant would appear in Ohio at some point. We are not surprised to have received notification of cases in Medina County, in addition to others around the state.

Over time, it is typical for viruses to change through mutation. The changes are not usually a cause for concern because the behavior of the virus doesn't change. The UK variant is notable because it appears to be more transmissible, or more contagious. Although the variant may not be affecting people much differently, it could spread at a faster rate, causing a greater number of people to become sick. This has not been observed in Medina County at this point, but it does underscore the importance of testing and isolating when ill. Our epidemiology team is closely monitoring the situation.

Naturally, people who become ill want to know if they have the original or a variant strain. A standard PCR diagnostic test cannot definitively answer this question, and not all tests are sent for gene sequencing to identify mutations. For those sent for additional testing that come back positive for a variant, the Health Department will call for an expanded interview. As in the early days of coronavirus, answering some public health questions will help establish if there are different symptoms, greater or lesser spread, and other factors that could help lower concern or detect changes in the virus. The patience and involvement of the public is critical to understanding this virus and continuing to move us back to a place of normalcy.

How can I protect myself from getting sick?

I don't want the news of the variant to cause alarm. It is important to understand that we will never be completely free from the threat of COVID-19 and learning to live with it will be part of our next step in moving forward.

Data in Medina County continues to trend in the right direction. Reported cases each week are steadily going down. The same public health interventions that have protected us since last year will continue to protect us now. Even with the vaccine not yet widely available, everything we are doing with social distancing, masking, and changing the way we operate business and activities add those layers of protection that will keep slowing the spread of the virus.

An update on vaccines

Speaking of vaccines... Last week was a frustrating week for the Health Department. The winter weather delayed a scheduled shipment of second dose vaccine and appointments needed to be rescheduled. We were able to expand clinics and get everyone in this week, but we know it was inconvenient for citizens affected. It was a relief to see vaccine this Monday and Tuesday so clinics can continue. Second doses are arriving without a problem, other than last week due to weather. Our first dose supply goes up and down each week, which makes it impossible to plan and schedule clinics more than a week in advance. With people on multiple provider lists, there is also a lower chance of a canceled appointment the closer it is made to the date it occurs. The Health Department adds clinics to Armovax on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday mornings.

Where can I find the latest information?

As information is made available, we will continue to update our website with resources about the vaccine: <https://medinahealth.org/vaccine>. You are also encouraged to visit the Ohio Department of Health's website for resources related to the COVID-19 vaccine: coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine.