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To: Complex Continuing Care/Rehabilitation Hospitals, Long Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes
From: Dr. Howard Shapiro
Re: COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) Variants of Concern - Infection Prevention and Control Reminders

New variants of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) have been reported in the news in recent weeks. Viruses constantly change through mutation and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. Sometimes new variants emerge and disappear. Other times, new variants emerge and persist. New variants may lead to either decreases or increases in severity of illness, frequency of death, and how easily the virus spreads. In addition, significant mutations may impact the ability of lab tests to detect the virus or may change the effectiveness of vaccines.

Public health officials are closely monitoring for new variants and studying them as they emerge. The Public Health Ontario Laboratory is conducting surveillance for COVID-19 variants and has developed indications to test for them. Should new variants be identified, they would be promptly reported to Toronto Public Health.

U.K. COVID-19 variants have been confirmed in Ontario and Toronto. The U.K. B.1.1.7 COVID-19 variant has been identified in the outbreak at Roberta Place long-term care home in Barrie. This variant is highly contagious. The rapid spread, high attack rate and impact on residents and staff is devastating. Given this news, Toronto Public Health (TPH) is asking that your organization review, [audit](#), and reinforce current infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, including any of its variants, in your setting.

IPAC measures include, but are not limited to:

- [Passive](#) and [Active Screening](#) (be sure to screen for recent travel)
- [Universal Masking](#)
- [Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [Hand Hygiene](#)
- Physical Distancing
- [Environmental Cleaning](#)
- [Surveillance Testing](#)
- [Auditing](#)

Should you have any questions, please contact your TPH Communicable Disease Liaison Unit, TPH Long-Term/Retirement Home liaison, or your IPAC hub.

Many thanks to you and your team for your continued hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Dr. Howard Shapiro
COVID-19 Operations Lead
and Associate Medical Officer of Health

More information:

- Public Health Ontario [COVID-19 UK Variant VOC – 202012/01 – What We Know So Far](#)
- Public Health Ontario [SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19 Virus\) Variant of Concern \(VoC\) Surveillance](#)
- U.S. Centre for Disease Control & Prevention [New COVID-19 Variants](#)