

Dr. Eileen de Villa
Medical Officer of Health

Public Health
277 Victoria Street
5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1W2

Tel: 416-338-7820
Fax: 416-392-0713
Eileen.deVilla@toronto.ca
toronto.ca/health

January 25, 2021

To: Shelter Providers
From: Dr. Howard Shapiro
Re: **COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) Variants of Concern - Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) 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 and reinforce current measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, including any of its variants, in your setting. These measures include, but are not limited to:

- Screening for [staff](#) and [clients](#) (including for travel)
- [Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [Hand Hygiene](#)
- [Physical Distancing](#)
- [Environmental Cleaning](#)
- And other elements of [routine prevention practices](#) and [outbreak management](#)

[Guidance for shelter settings](#) can be found on-line. To report new cases or outbreaks, or if you have any questions, please email TPHShelters@toronto.ca.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard Shapiro".

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

More information:

- Public Health Ontario [COVID-19 UK Variant VoC – 2020 12/01 – 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 and Prevention [New COVID-19 Variants](#)