



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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State lab detects COVID-19 variant

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) State Laboratories Division (SLD) has detected the SARS-CoV-2 variant L452R. This strain of COVID-19 was first detected in Denmark in March 2020. It is now found in more than a dozen U.S. states.

Science has not shown the L452R variant spreads more quickly or poses a greater threat than other COVID-19 strains, but there is concern because it has been linked to a growing number of cases in California including several large outbreaks.

"It is common to find variants to viruses like COVID-19. Some present greater risks than others," said Dr. Sarah Kemble, acting state epidemiologist. "We are working with our colleagues in other states as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to learn more about the characteristics of this particular variant."

The department's State Laboratories Division began genome sequencing in June looking for possible COVID-19 variants. It now examines 75 specimens a week and has developed a testing algorithm designed to find variants as soon as possible after they arrive.

The B.1.1.7 variant first found in the United Kingdom and the B.1.351 variant first found in South Africa both have enhanced transmissibility. Neither B.1.1.7 nor B.1.351 has been detected in Hawai'i.

"Hawai'i is not immune to new strains," said Health Director Dr. Elizabeth Char. "The arrival of L452R reminds us we must wear masks, maintain physical distance from people outside our immediate households, and avoid crowds. These safe practices coupled with COVID-19 vaccines will help us stop the spread."

- Regardless of what COVID-19 variants are found in Hawai'i, residents and visitors can play an important role in slowing transmission of the virus. This includes:
 - Wearing masks when leaving home
 - Limiting interactions with people outside immediate households
 - Keeping physical distance of at least 6 feet apart
 - Washing hands for 20 seconds
 - Getting the COVID-19 vaccine if eligible and vaccine is available (and continuing these safety measures even after vaccination)

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