

Benton-Franklin Health District
www.bfhd.wa.gov

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Benton-Franklin Health District Website
www.bfhd.wa.gov

Washington Department of Health
www.doh.wa.gov

Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 Variant B.1.1.7 Confirmed in Benton Co.

The Washington State Department of Health notified Benton-Franklin Health District today that the COVID-19 variant B.1.1.7, also known as the U.K. Variant, has been identified in a specimen collection from Benton County. This is the first B.1.1.7 variant identified on the east side of the state.

“While there is cause for concern, there is no need for alarm,” said Dr. Amy Person, health officer for Benton, Franklin and Klickitat counties. “Because of the intense resources required to identify variants, only a portion of collected samples are sent for genotyping,” she continued. “Although we do have confirmation the variant is in the community, the identification of the B.1.1.7 variant in a specimen indicates a local presence, but not the local prevalence.” Washington state conducts sequencing on less than 3% of positive specimens.

Public health has been prepared for variant strains to occur with COVID-19 as is the normal process for viruses as they spread from host to host. The international attention to specific variant strains, including the U.K. and South African variants, are due to the nature of how they behave including whether they spread more easily or result in higher rates of mortality. It is more important now than ever to continue to do everything we can to consistently take steps to stop spread of the virus and ultimately stop the chance of more mutations.

“Evidence has shown that the U.K. Variant is more contagious,” Dr. Person said. “However, it is inconclusive at this time if the strain is more deadly,” she continued. “The best way to stop virus mutations is to stop spread. Fortunately, we have excellent tools in our toolbox including three vaccines that are highly effective against this strain, and proven methods to stop spread including masking, hand hygiene, distancing, limiting gatherings, and decreasing time around other outside our household.”

Benton-Franklin Health District continues to urge residents to stay home if you are ill, avoid others unless you need urgent medical attention, get a free COVID-19 test, and cooperate with public health officials if you are called. Local information and resources are available on the District website at <https://covid19.bfhd.wa.gov>.

Resources: [DOH COVID-19 Variants Information](#) ; [CDC COVID-19 Variants Information](#)
[DOH SARS-CoV-2 Sequencing and Variants in Washington State Report](#)

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