

Key Messages: COVID-19 Variants

- Variants are common with a virus like COVID-19. Viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time.
- Multiple COVID-19 variants are circulating globally, and in the United States. Several of these variants have been identified and are spreading in Minnesota.
- MDH and our partners are actively testing new positive test samples to continue to detect variants and learn more.
- **These variants are concerning because they are more contagious.** For example, early data shows that some variants spread more easily and can be as much as 50% more contagious than the original virus. Currently, the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant is the most common in Minnesota.
- New data suggest the Delta variant is different than past versions of the virus and spreads about twice as easily from one person to another.

How vaccination helps

- With the Delta variant, fully vaccinated people may be able to pass the disease to others.
- Vaccination reduces overall spread of the virus, which makes it harder for it to change (mutate) and create variants. Vaccination also helps protect against the variants, especially severe disease. That's why it's so important for all who are eligible to get vaccinated.

Testing for variants

- COVID-19 tests do not tell you which variant you have.
- Through a process called sequencing, scientists can determine which variant cause the infection and monitor how the virus is changing.
- A percentage of people's tests — not all tests — are sent to the state's public health lab. Testing for variants takes a long time and a lot of work. It takes the lab about 42 hours to

run 100 tests. We send enough tests to give us a good idea of what variants are spreading.

- We are not able to release the results of these variant tests to doctors or patients. No matter which variant you have, you'll take the same steps, like staying away from others, getting vaccinated, and wearing a mask when recommended.