



Coronavirus Variants

Coronavirus variants are in the news frequently now. Learning about virus variants and why scientists are concerned about them will help us protect our health and the health of our families and communities.

What are virus variants?

Variants are slightly different copies of an original virus that makes us sick. When viruses spread from person to person, they copy their codes (genome sequences) with each new infection. The virus that causes COVID-19 has 30,000¹ sequences in its code and when it is copied – sometimes slight mistakes are made, changing the virus a bit. This changed virus is called a variant.

Changes to viruses are normal. All viruses – including the one that causes COVID-19 disease – change over time. Most changes and variants do not alter how the virus behaves when it makes us sick. But sometimes certain changes can cause variants to spread faster, make people sicker, or make vaccines less effective². These kinds of virus variants are called Variants of Concern (VOC).³

Coronavirus Variants of Concern in the United States

As of April 2021, there are five coronavirus Variants of Concern in the United States being watched and tracked carefully by scientists and medical professionals. All of these new variants appear to be more contagious than the original coronavirus and spread more easily to unvaccinated people. And, some appear to cause more severe disease⁴.

The good news is that we have tools to protect ourselves and our communities from these new variants.

To learn more about VOCs, see: [COVID-Variants](#)

Can the vaccines protect us from new variants?

YES! All the vaccines we currently have provide protection against the variants⁵. While the levels of protection can vary, studies have shown that the vaccines protect against severe disease, hospitalization, and death from the variants. Research is on-going into how protective the vaccines are and if booster shots for the variants are needed, but right now, there is no evidence to suggest a significant reduction in vaccine effectiveness, meaning vaccination remains one of the most important tools in defeating COVID-19.

How can we prevent the spread of new variants?

Stopping the spread of new variants is possible and everyone can help. Remaining vigilant until the majority of all our people, young and old, and surrounding communities are vaccinated is critical. Measures to limit the spread of the virus haven't changed – wearing a mask, physical distancing, avoiding crowded places or closed settings, and frequent hand washing – work by reducing the potential for transmission of the variants and, therefore, reducing opportunities for the virus to change. Continue practicing these measures until health authorities say it is safe to stop.

Since I am young and healthy, and our elders are vaccinated – do I still need to be vaccinated?

YES! Getting vaccinated is especially important now that the virus is changing. When a virus is circulating widely to unvaccinated people, it has more opportunities to change when copying itself and can potentially make variants that are even more dangerous. No matter what your age, it is critical to get vaccinated when it's your turn. This will help protect our communities, including our treasured elders.

As Indigenous people, it is our role to learn from those who came before us and nurture those who come next. We dance, we pray, we share, we adapt, we protect. Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect our community and the quickest way to end the pandemic!

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/amd/pdf/slidesets/ToolkitModule_1.2.pdf

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/the-effects-of-virus-variants-on-covid-19-vaccines>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/variant-surveillance/variant-info.html>

⁴ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/expert-answers/covid-variant/faq-20505779>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/15/well/live/covid-variants-vaccine.html?searchResultPosition=1>

⁶ <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/t-cells-recognize-recent-sars-cov-2-variants>