COVID-19 “California variant” infects Kaua’i family

LĪHU’E – The Kaua’i District Health Office announced Wednesday that a COVID-19 variant has been confirmed on the island.

Samples from four household members confirmed that they were infected with the variant b1.429, also known as the “California variant.” The household cluster is related to inter-island travel.

Kaua’i had one previous case of the B1.429 variant in January 2021. That case was also related to travel.

“The B1.429 variant is the dominant form of COVID-19 circulating on Oahu and in Maui County, so it is not surprising that this variant was found related to inter-island travel,” said Dr. Janet Berreman, Kaua’i District Health Officer. “It is also the dominant strain now in California, which poses a risk for additional introduction to Kaua’i as travel restrictions are loosened. The B 1.429 variant is of concern because it is more easily transmissible from person to person and therefore poses an increased risk of community spread.”

The variant was found when seven members of a household tested positive for COVID-19, after two family members traveled inter-island. Because of the significant transmission in the household and the travel history, samples from several of these cases were submitted for genomic sequencing to see whether they might be one of the variants of concern identified by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
All four samples were confirmed to be the variant B1.429.

Fortunately, all known close contacts of these cases have completed their quarantine period and have been tested, and no additional cases have been identified. The Kaua‘i District Health Office will continue monitoring our community for cases and testing for variants.

Six of the seven family members were unvaccinated at the time of their exposure, and the seventh had received only one of two doses. All seven confirmed cases were placed in health-directed isolation for 10 days after the onset of their illness. All confirmed cases, whether or not vaccinated, must complete a full isolation period to prevent any possibility of further transmission to others.

Thankfully, several of the people outside of the family who came into close contact with the infected family members were already fully vaccinated, having completed their vaccine doses 14 days or more before their first date of exposure. Per CDC guidelines, fully vaccinated people who come into contact with an infected person are not required to by health officials to isolate. Instead, they were able to continue working and going about their normal daily activities while self-monitoring for symptoms.  

[NOTE: This refers to health-directed isolation, NOT mandatory traveler quarantines and exemptions.]

The Kaua‘i District Health Office assisted with vaccine appointments for the cases and contacts age 16 or older who were not yet fully vaccinated and wanted to be vaccinated.

“As residents travel more—both to the mainland and inter-island—and as we welcome more visitors to our island, it is especially important that we all continue to take precautions,” said Dr. Berreman. “The strongest step we can take is to be vaccinated. I encourage all residents 16 years of age and older to make an appointment now, if they have not already been vaccinated. And mahalo to those who have been vaccinated.”

All Kaua‘i residents age 16 and older can make appointments now for the Pfizer vaccine, and residents 18 and older for the Moderna vaccine, by visiting kauai.gov/vaccine

Vaccination appointments are available this week at Longs, Safeway, and Walmart, the Kaiser clinic in Lihue, Mahelona, KVMH, and Wilcox hospitals, Ho‘ola Lahui Clinics, and the Department of
Health clinic at the Kaua‘i War Memorial Convention Hall in Lihue. Please make your appointment soon, as some clinics will close in the weeks to come.

If you are 60 or older or need English language assistance, walk-in vaccinations are available at the Convention Hall Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday mornings from 9 to 11, no appointment needed.

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