COVID-19 “UK variant” detected in Kaua’i visitor

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

The B.117 variant, also known as the “UK variant,” was detected in a sample taken from a U.S. mainland visitor who tested positive on the island earlier this month.

The visitor received a negative pre-travel test before traveling from the mainland to Kaua’i, then tested positive several days after arriving. The visitor’s close contacts were identified, directed to quarantine, and tested. They have completed their 10-day quarantine period and been released. No additional cases have been detected in the community. The visitor’s sample was submitted for genomic sequencing to see whether it might be one of the variants of concern identified by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and it was confirmed to be the B.117 variant.

This comes a week after the B 1.429 “California” variant was confirmed in a Kaua’i household group who became ill as a result of inter-island travel. In that case also, all close contacts completed testing and quarantine and there is no evidence to date of transmission into the community.

The Kaua’i District Health Office continues to monitor our community for cases and test for variants.
Selected samples from the recent new cases will have genomic sequencing performed at the State Laboratory. This testing for variants takes approximately eight business days, so results will not be available for another 1-2 weeks. In the meantime, all cases are being managed with isolation of cases, quarantine, and testing of all close contacts. Due to the high transmission rates to household contact members from several of these cases, Kaua‘i health officials expect that at least a few of them are the result of COVID-19 variants. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), these variants spread more easily and quickly than earlier strains, which can lead to more cases of COVID-19.

Currently available vaccines provide strong protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death from these variants. The B117 variant is additionally of concern because it appears to cause more severe illness and more deaths. This makes vaccination especially important to provide protection from severe disease. These variants are being closely investigated and more studies are underway. For more information, please visit: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html

“These variants are now the dominant strains elsewhere in the state and on the mainland. With more frequent travel to and from our island—by residents and visitors—we can expect additional introduction and spread of variants,” said Dr. Janet Berreman, Kaua‘i District Health Officer. “The best protection we have is to be vaccinated. Even after being vaccinated, it is essential that we continue to exercise caution: wear masks when around others, avoid large gatherings, keep your distance, and stay home if you are sick. If you are 16 years of age or older and have not been vaccinated, now is the time to get your vaccine. For those of you who have been vaccinated—mahalo for setting a good example and protecting our community. Please encourage others to do the same.”

All Kaua‘i residents age 16 and older can make appointments now 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 Kauai War Memorial Convention Hall. Please make your appointment soon, as the Department of Health clinic will close for first-dose appointments after the Thursday April 29 clinic.

If you are 60 or older or need English language assistance, walk-in first-dose vaccinations will be available at the Convention Hall this week only: Tuesday, April 27, Wednesday, April 28, or Thursday April 29, from 9 to 11 a.m. Multi-lingual staff will be there in person to assist you.

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