



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**This is an official  
MS Health Alert Network (HAN) Alert**

**MESSAGE ID:** MSHAN-20210319-00508-ALT (Health Alert)  
**RECIPIENTS:** All Physicians, Hospitals, ERs, ICPs, NPs, and  
Healthcare Providers – Statewide  
**Friday, March 19, 2021**  
**SUBJECT:** Identification of First B.1.351 SARS-CoV-2 Variant  
Strain in Mississippi

Dear Colleagues,

The Mississippi State Department of Health is reporting the detection of the first B.1.351 SARS-CoV-2 “South African” variant strain in a Harrison County resident. On February 15, MSDH reported the first detection of a B.1.1.7 SARS-CoV-2 variant strain in a Mississippi resident.

To date, 180 cases of the B.1.351 South African variant have been identified in 26 states and Washington D.C; additionally, 5,567 cases of B.1.1.7 (UK Variant) and 48 cases of P.1 variant have been reported in the US (see [US COVID-19 Cases Caused by Variants | CDC](#) for additional information).

These variants are classified as “Variants of Concern” due to a potential for increased transmissibility, a potential for increased severity of illness, and potential evidence of reduced vaccine induced protection and resistance to one or more classes of therapies. There are a growing number of “Variants of Concern” being identified, including two California strains: B.1.427 and B.1.429. The South African strain is specifically known to be more transmissible with a moderate impact on neutralization by monoclonal antibody therapeutics and moderate reduction on neutralization by post-vaccine sera.

The B.1.351 strain in the Mississippi resident was identified through sequencing of a sample collected earlier in March 2021. Investigation is ongoing but exposure to a family member with recent travel to South Africa has been identified. Since the first case of B.1.1.7 was reported in mid-February, an additional nine cases of UK Variant have been identified. The cases are in Forrest, Lincoln (2), Coahoma, Desoto (2), Jackson, Marshall, Hinds and Harrison Counties. A list of variant cases by county can be found at [COVID-19 Cases by Variant Type.xlsx \(ms.gov\)](#). This list will be updated weekly.

MSDH is expanding the intensity and geographic scope of surveillance for variant strains in the state. It is likely additional variant strains will be identified among Mississippi residents.

Mississippi Providers and laboratories are asked to assist with the following:

1. Continue to strongly recommend wearing a mask, social distancing, avoiding large gatherings and frequent hand hygiene.

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2. Continue to recommend vaccination. Currently, all Mississippians 16 years and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccine. It is especially important that individuals in the following categories are vaccinated:
  - a. Persons aged 50 years and older;
  - b. Persons aged 16-49 years with certain underlying conditions,
  - c. Healthcare personnel, or
  - d. Residents of a long-term care facility.
  - e. For eligibility criteria see [COVID-19 Vaccination Sites, Eligibility and Appointments - Mississippi State Department of Health \(ms.gov\)](https://www.health.ms.gov/COVID-19/Vaccination-Sites-Eligibility-and-Appointments)
  
3. Report to the Office of Epidemiology (601-576-7725) and submit PCR samples for genomic sequencing to the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory (MPHL), any individuals with:
  - a. **Suspected Re-infection**-Individuals with a positive COVID-19 RNA test  $\geq 90$  days after the initial laboratory confirmed infection, whether symptomatic or not. MSDH is interested in conducting genomic sequencing at the MPHL even if there are not paired respiratory specimens available (i.e., respiratory sample from the initial infection is not available).
  - b. **Suspected vaccine failures**-Fully vaccinated individuals with a positive viral test (antigen or PCR)  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or  $\geq 2$  weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine (only PCR samples are requested for submission to MPHL for genomic sequencing).

*Additional resources:* The US FDA has updated Fact Sheets for the authorized monoclonal antibody treatments with information on antiviral resistance ([bamlanivimab](#), [bamlanivimab with etesevimab](#), and [casirivimab with imdevimab](#)).

As always, please contact the MSDH Office of Epidemiology with questions at 601-576-7725.

Regards,

Paul Byers, MD  
State Epidemiologist



**Alerting Message Specification Settings**

**Originating Agency:** Mississippi State Department of Health  
**Alerting Program:** MS Health Alert Network (MS HAN)  
**Message Identifier:** MSHAN-20210319-00508-ALT  
**Program (HAN) Type:** Health Alert  
**Status (Type):** Actual ()  
**Message Type:** Alert  
**Reference:** MSHAN-00508  
**Severity:** Unknown  
**Acknowledgement:** No  
**Sensitive:** Not Sensitive  
**Message Expiration:** Undetermined  
**Urgency:** Undetermined  
**Delivery Time:** 600 minutes

**Definition of Alerting Vocabulary and Message Specification Settings**

**Originating Agency:** A unique identifier for the agency originating the alert.

**Alerting Program:** The program sending the alert or engaging in alerts and communications using PHIN Communication and Alerting (PCA) as a vehicle for their delivery.

**Message Identifier:** A unique alert identifier that is generated upon alert activation (MSHAN-yyymmdd-hhmm-TTT (**ALT=Health Alert**, **ADV=Health Advisory**, **UPD=Health Update**, **MSG/INFO=Message/Info Service**)).

**Program (HAN) Type:** Categories of Health Alert Messages.

**Health Alert:** Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

**Health Info Service:** Provides Message / Notification of general public health information; unlikely to require immediate action.

**Status (Type):**

Actual:	Communication or alert refers to a live event
Exercise:	Designated recipients must respond to the communication or alert
Test:	Communication or alert is related to a technical, system test and should be disregarded



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**Message Type:**

Alert: Indicates an original Alert  
Update: Indicates prior alert has been Updated and/or superseded  
Cancel: Indicates prior alert has been cancelled  
Error: Indicates prior alert has been retracted

**Reference:** For a communication or alert with a Message Type of “Update” or “Cancel”, this attribute contains the unique Message Identifier of the original communication or alert being updated or cancelled. “n/a” = Not Applicable.

**Severity:**

Extreme: Extraordinary threat to life or property  
Severe: Significant threat to life or property  
Moderate: Possible threat to life or property  
Minor: Minimal threat to life or property  
Unknown: Unknown threat to life or property

**Acknowledgement:** Indicates whether an acknowledgement on the part of the recipient is required to confirm that the alert was received, and the timeframe in which a response is required (Yes or No).

**Sensitive:**

Sensitive: Indicates the alert contains sensitive content  
Not Sensitive: Indicates non-sensitive content

**Message Expiration:** Undetermined.

**Urgency:** Undetermined. Responsive action should be taken immediately.

**Delivery Time:** Indicates the timeframe for delivery of the alert (15, 60, 1440, 4320 minutes (.25, 1, 24, 72 hours)).