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**Chicago and Illinois Departments of Public Health confirm first Illinois case of the COVID-19 P.1 variant, which was first detected in Brazilian travelers**

CHICAGO – The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) today announced the first case in Illinois of the COVID-19 variant called P.1. The P.1 variant was first identified in travelers from Brazil during routine airport screening in Tokyo, Japan, in early January but has subsequently been identified in several other countries.

A case of P.1 was first identified in the United States at the end of January in Minnesota and has since been identified in several other states. The case in Chicago was identified by the Pathogen Genomics research team at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine through sequencing analysis of a COVID-19 specimen. A follow-up investigation by CDPH found that a household contact of this individual had also recently been unwell with COVID-19, but neither this individual nor their household contacts reported travel outside Illinois.

Evidence suggests that this variant can spread more easily than most currently circulating strains of COVID-19, and there is some evidence that some mutations in the P.1 variant may affect the ability of antibodies (from natural infection or vaccination) to recognize and neutralize the virus, but additional studies are needed.

The news doesn't change public health guidance around COVID-19. The same strategies used to contain the spread of COVID-19 will work against the new variants: wear a well-fitting mask; practice social distancing; avoid gatherings; don't travel unnecessarily; wash your hands often. And get vaccinated when it's your turn.

CDPH, IDPH and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with various public health agencies, are closely monitoring this strain and other COVID-19 variants.

CDPH is working to identify close contacts of the individual to reinforce the importance of adherence with quarantine and isolation measures. CDPH is also working with the CDC and IDPH to contribute to national SARS-CoV-2 strain surveillance and is establishing a Regional Innovative Public Health Laboratory (RIPHL) through a partnership with Rush University Medical Center to increase public health surveillance of possible COVID-19 variants in the Chicago region.

IDPH has been sending COVID-19 positive respiratory samples to Southern Illinois University (SIU) Carbondale for sequencing since May of 2020. SIU has sequenced more than 1,000 samples looking for variants of concern as identified by the CDC and new emerging variants. Working with CDC, CDPH, university research labs, and various reference labs, IDPH is coordinating testing efforts, determining sampling strategies, and working to consolidate data into a centralized source. Laboratories are being asked to submit a limited number of samples to IDPH laboratories weekly for surveillance testing to monitor virus mutation within Illinois.