

California detects second confirmed case of virus variant in U.S.



Sacramento, December 31 (RHC)-- California has announced the United States' second confirmed case of the new and apparently more contagious variant of the coronavirus, offering a strong indication that the infection is spreading more widely in the United States.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the infection found in Southern California during an online conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "I don't think Californians should think that this is odd. It's to be expected," Fauci said. Newsom did not provide any details about the person who was infected.

The announcement came 24 hours after word of the first reported US variant infection, which emerged in Colorado. That person was identified Wednesday as a Colorado National Guardsman who had been sent

to help out at a nursing home struggling with an outbreak. Health officials said a second Guard member may have it too.

The cases triggered a host of questions about how the version circulating in England arrived in the US and whether it is too late to stop it now, with top experts saying it is probably already spreading elsewhere in the United States.

“The virus is becoming more fit, and we’re like a deer in the headlights,” warned Dr. Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute. He noted that the U.S. does far less genetic sequencing of virus samples to discover variants than other developed nations, and thus was probably slow to detect this new mutation.

The two Guard members had been dispatched December 23rd to work at the Good Samaritan Society nursing home in the small town of Simla, in a mostly rural area about 90 miles outside Denver, said Dr. Rachel Herlihy, state epidemiologist. They were among six Guard members sent to the home.

Nasal swab samples taken from the two as part of the Guard’s routine coronavirus testing were sent to the state laboratory, which began looking for the variant after its spread was announced in Britain earlier this month, Herlihy said. Samples from staff and residents at the nursing home are also being screened for the variant at the lab, but so far no evidence of it has been found, she said.

The Colorado case announced Tuesday involves a man in his 20s who had not traveled recently, officials said. He has mild symptoms and is isolating at his home near Denver, while the person with the suspected case is isolating at a Colorado hotel while further genetic analysis is done on his sample, officials said.

The nursing home said it is working closely with the state and is also looking forward to beginning vaccinations next week.

Several states, including California, Massachusetts and Delaware, are also analyzing suspicious virus samples for the variant, said Dr. Greg Armstrong, who directs genetic sequencing at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He said the CDC is working with a national lab that gets samples from around the country to broaden that search, with results expected within days.

The discovery in Colorado has added urgency to the nation’s vaccination drive against COVID-19, which has killed more than 340,000 people in the United States.

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