

UK strain of COVID-19 virus found in Florida



Miami, January 1 (RHC)-- The variant of the COVID-19 virus first found in the United Kingdom is now in Florida, health officials announced late Thursday — the same day the state broke its own record for the single-day number of reported positive cases. "Florida has evidence of the first identified case of the UK COVID-19 variant in Martin County," the Florida Department of Health said in a tweet shortly after 8 p.m.

Martin County is directly north of Palm Beach County, on the state's southeast coast. "The individual is a male in his 20s with no history of travel," it added. "The Department is working with the CDC on this investigation. We encourage all to continue practicing COVID-19 mitigation."

Scientists in the United Kingdom say the variant strain, known as B.1.1.7, is more contagious than previously identified strains but not more severe. According to models, it has an increased transmission rate of 70% compared with other variants in the UK.

A CDC spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Florida health officials in Tallahassee were unavailable. In a second tweet, however, the department said, "At this time, experts anticipate little to no impact on the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine. For updates on the state's vaccination efforts, text FLCOVID19 to 888777."

Colorado reported the first known case of the variant in the US on Tuesday and was investigating a second possible case Wednesday. Both of the cases are National Guard soldiers who were deployed to support staffing at a nursing home in Simla, Colorado, outside Denver, state health officials there said.

Only about 2.8 million Americans had received a COVID-19 vaccine going into the last day of December, way short of the target of vaccinating 20 million people. California then reported its first case of the variant — the second confirmed case in the US.

The strain at issue was first spotted in September in southeastern England and accounted for a quarter of cases in London by November. By the week of December 9, it was responsible for 60% of cases in the city.

Florida reported 17,192 new COVID-19 cases — a new record for a single-day tally — and 127 newly verified deaths on Thursday.

The cumulative number of Florida cases is now 1,323,315 and the reported death toll for state residents since the pandemic began is 21,673.

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