

29 Jan 2021

## COVID-19: new virus variants

**A number of new COVID-19 virus variants have been identified across the world**

- **This updates the news item of 21 January 2021**

A number of new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes [coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#), have been identified, originating from different countries across the world [1,2].

Surveillance globally continues to identify changes in the virus; this is to be expected and most new variants are not generally a cause for concern [3].

However, it is the variants that increase transmission from person to person or can evade the host immune response that are considered variants of concern, resulting in increased cases and pressure on health care systems globally [4, 5].

### Advice for travellers

If a new variant of concern is identified, you may experience disruption to your journey or plans at short notice such as:

- Immediate travel restrictions, including flight cancellations and suspension of entry into the UK. Check with your airline or travel provider before setting out on your journey and also prior to your return to the UK. A [list of countries with travel restrictions](#) in place can be found on GOV.UK.
- Additional public health measures: i.e. those sharing a household with anyone who is self-isolating, after returning from a country where travel is suspended, may also be required to self-isolate.
- Not being eligible for the Test to Release scheme on your return.
- Closure of land borders to limit the spread of variants to neighbouring countries.
- On 27 January 2021, [tougher border controls to protect public health](#) were announced, which includes managed isolation in hotels for those returning from countries with travel restrictions in place, further details are expected to follow.

Travellers are recommended to check their [travel insurance policy](#) and to be prepared if time abroad is unexpectedly extended due to the implementation of new restrictions.

### Resources

- [GAVI; The Vaccine Alliance. What do the new COVID-19 variants mean for vaccine development?](#)
- [TravelHealthPro: Medicines and Travel](#)
- [TravelHealthPro: Travel Insurance](#)
- [World Health Organization. Health Topics: Coronavirus](#)
- [World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Virus Evolution](#)
- [Public Health England. Confirmed cases of COVID-19 variants identified in UK](#)

## References

1. [World Health Organization. Disease Outbreak News: SARS-CoV-2 Variants. 31 December 2020. \[Accessed 21 January 2021\]](#)
2. [Pan American Health Organization. Occurrence of variants of SARS-CoV-2 in the Americas. 11 January 2021. \[Accessed 21 January 2021\]](#)
3. [GOV.UK Confirmed cases of COVID-19 variants identified in UK. 15 January 2021 \[Accessed 21 January 2021\]](#)
4. [ECDC. Rapid Risk Assessment: Risk related to spread of new SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern in the EU/EEA. 29 December 2020. \[Accessed 21 January 2021\]](#)
5. [World Health Organization. News: Global scientists double down on SARS-CoV-2 variants research at WHO-hosted forum. \[Accessed 21 January 2021\]](#)