

# COVID-19



Northern Population Health Unit

# Weekly Update

## LA RONGE

### AS OF MARCH 2, 2021

## COVID-19 Cases

<b>≤5</b> New cases in last 7 days	<b>≤5</b> Recoveries in last 7 days	<b>≤5</b> Current active cases	<b>170</b> Total cumulative cases
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Note: To preserve confidentiality, case numbers less than or equal to 5 in any category are reported as ≤5.

## Key Messages

- Stay home if you are feeling unwell or experiencing ANY symptoms of COVID-19.
- Get tested as soon as possible when your symptoms start.
- Limit indoor gatherings to your immediate household only (people you live with).
- Wash your hands often.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, mouth or mask with unwashed hands.
- Keep at least 2 metres away from others when in public and wear a mask.
- Do not travel outside your community unless it is for essential reasons.
- Get vaccinated when it is your turn!

## Variants of Concern

Genetic variations of viruses, such as the one that causes COVID-19, are common and expected.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, will naturally develop mutations, which are changes to the genetic material in the virus over time. When there have been several significant mutations to the virus then it's called a variant.

A variant is of concern when it affects:

- disease spread
- disease severity
- tests used to detect the virus
- vaccines and treatments

The Saskatchewan Health Authority is actively and diligently monitoring COVID-19 specimens for all variants of the virus. Saskatchewan's Roy Romanow Provincial Laboratory now has the capacity to do whole genome sequencing testing for variants of concern.

### How many VOCs are in Saskatchewan right now?

- As of 23 February 2021, the provincial total of confirmed variant of concern cases to seven: six B1.1.7 (first identified in the UK) including one presumptive case, and one B1.351 (first identified in South Africa). So far we have not had any identified in the Far North.

### What's the difference between COVID-19 and the variants?

- The variants of concern are collections of mutations in the COVID-19 virus.
- The mode of transmission and the symptoms are the same. Older residents and those with underlying health conditions continue to be those at greatest risk of severe illness and death.
- Evidence indicates that the variants of concern are more transmissible, meaning that it takes less potential exposure time to catch a COVID-19 variant and that a person develops symptoms faster.

### Will the vaccines work against the variants of concern?

- Public health officials are monitoring the effectiveness of the vaccines against the variants of concern and we are seeing manufacturers review their products to confirm that they will be effective.
- Early indications are that the vaccine is effective against variants.
- Based on any new research, vaccination programs may be modified to ensure the most effective vaccines are used if we see certain variants become predominant.
- Overall, increased vaccination for COVID-19 will reduce virus transmission, including that of the variants of concern.

#### References:

PHAC (2021). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Outbreak update. COVID-19 Variants. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a8>

Saskatchewan Health Authority News (2021). Available at: <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news/service-alerts-emergency-events/covid-19/general-info-health-providers/Documents/Safety%20Information/COVID-Variants-of-concern-QandA-Feb-23-2021.pdf#search=variants>