



MINISTRY OF HEALTH WELLNESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

ST. JOHN'S ANTIGUA

Press Release

SARS CoV-2 Variants of Concern Update

January 6 2022

The Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment has received confirmation from the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) of the omicron variant strain of the SARS CoV-2 in Antigua and Barbuda. While Ministry of Health officials have suspected the presence of Omicron in Antigua and Barbuda, this is the first certified confirmation of the variant's presence.

The omicron variant of concern (VOC), first identified in South Africa in November 2021, was found in a set of samples sent to CARPHA in December 2021. The delta variant of concern, first identified in Antigua and Barbuda in July 2021, was identified in the other samples.

The omicron variant is identified by multiple spike protein mutations. Experts believe that it is more transmissible than other VOCs. However, it may cause more or less severe disease, less hospitalizations and decreased intensive care unit (ICU) admissions and deaths.

The World Health Organization has so far confirmed five variants of concern circulating globally. Antigua and Barbuda has been sending samples to CARPHA for genomic sequencing to detect variants since October 2020. As a result of the Ministry of Health's increased surveillance, all five VOCs have now been identified in Antigua and Barbuda.

The public is reminded that after a decline in the number of COVID-19 cases since the end of the last surge in November 2021, we are now seeing an increase in the number of cases. This reinforces the fact that we must continue to adhere to the public health measures to prevent and control the disease. These include physical and social distancing, using face masks and practicing hand hygiene and cough etiquette.

The public is further reminded that vaccination is one of the most effective measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Persons are therefore urged to get fully vaccinated and get their boosters utilizing the AstraZeneca, Sino pharm, Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson vaccines readily available at our vaccination Centres in the Multipurpose and Cultural Centre and the Villa Polyclinic.