



Humboldt County COVID-19 Joint Information Center
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news release

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Vaccines Appear Effective Against COVID-19 Variants of Concern

Local health officials see strong evidence that COVID-19 vaccines are effective against all four “variants of concern” that have been identified in Humboldt County since November 2020. Yet young adults, the group most affected by these variants, remain the least vaccinated group in the county.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) designate variants of concern, which have mutations in the genome that cause the virus to act differently — spreading more easily, causing more severe disease or requiring different treatments.

Current data suggest that the vaccines used in the U.S. protect against all known variants spreading in the country. “Even if a virus has one or more mutations in the spike protein, vaccines and natural infection would still be expected to provide valuable protection,” according to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).

Since January of this year, the number of new cases in Humboldt County has risen sharply among adults under the age of 40. Making up less than a third of the county population, young adults represent nearly half of the county’s total COVID-19 cases. At the same time, vaccination rates are lagging behind in that age group, especially in 20- to 29-year-olds, with fewer than 36% of them fully vaccinated.

“We are seeing cases in younger folks and sicker people hospitalized, even people in their teens,” noted Dr. Ian Hoffman, Humboldt County Public Health Officer. “Variants like Alpha appear to be more infectious, more contagious, to make people sicker, and hit younger folks harder than the previous versions of the virus. Until people are vaccinated, this virus will continue to circulate among unvaccinated folks, and the potential for serious illness is still very high even in the younger age group,” he warned.

Local contact tracing and genome sequencing have tied recent Humboldt County outbreaks to two variants labelled Alpha and Gamma by the World Health Organization (WHO).

At present, Alpha and Gamma stand as the prevalent variants of concern in Humboldt County. Alpha, introduced to the county in late March, spread immediately through large gatherings to become the most common variant in Humboldt County. Less than a month later, the Gamma variant appeared and quickly caught up. The West Coast variant, now called Epsilon, has been circulating in Humboldt County since November 2020.

The Delta variant had been confined to a single local case in May, and county health officials are still only seeing "very few" instances of Delta but expecting it along with the other variants to increase in Humboldt as elsewhere. According to the CDC, Delta now represents 20% of new cases in the nation. In California, the CDPH notes that 14.5% of new cases have been identified as Delta, spurring some counties to reinstate indoor masking recommendations.

"Testing continues to be an important part of our local COVID response" says Dr. Jeremy Corrigan, Humboldt County Laboratory Manager. "Our laboratory began sequencing COVID-positive samples on-site late May 2021, which allows continued monitoring of new variants and case investigation support."

Vaccines not only work better against variants, but also show signs of lasting longer, note local Public Health officials. "This immune response is strong, and it appears to be potentially much more long-lasting than we originally thought that it was going to be," Hoffman said.

View the Humboldt County Data Dashboard online at humboldt.gov/dashboard, or go to humboldt.gov/DashboardArchives to download the most recent data.

For the most recent COVID-19 information, visit cdc.gov or cdph.ca.gov. Local information is available at humboldt.gov or by contacting covidinfo@co.humboldt.ca.us or calling 707-441-5000.

Sign up for COVID-19 vaccination: MyTurn.ca.gov

Check for vaccine availability at a local pharmacy: Vaccines.gov

Local COVID-19 vaccine information: humboldt.gov/VaccineInfo

Humboldt County COVID-19 Data Dashboard: humboldt.gov/Dashboard

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