



# CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES CHICAGO

## PUBLIC ADVISORY NO. 06-2021

### DISCOVERY OF NEW VARIANT OF COVID-19 VIRUS IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

The Philippine Consulate General in Chicago wishes to inform the Filipino and Filipino-American communities in the Midwest that a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has been discovered by scientists at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and College of Medicine.

**The new variant, called COH.20G/501Y, which reportedly carries a mutation identical to the U.K. strain and likely arose in a virus strain already present in the U.S., was discovered in one patient from Ohio.** Researchers have yet to determine the prevalence of the strain in the population. The discovery suggests that the mutation may be occurring independently in various locations worldwide in the past few months.

**The Wexner Medical Center also reported the evolution of another U.S. strain that acquired three other gene mutations not previously seen together in SARS-CoV-2.** While it has the same genetic backbone as earlier cases, **the three mutations are seen as a “significant evolution,” and that the changes did not come from the U.K or South African branches of the virus. As observed in a three-week period from late December 2020 to January 2021, this strain has become the dominant virus in Columbus, Ohio.**

**The mutations in the Columbus strain are likely to make the virus more infectious and thus easier to spread, according to the study.**

The scientists caution against overreacting to the new variant until more information on its prevalence and impact is gathered. It is still unclear whether the mutations make vaccines and therapeutics less effective, but there is currently no data to suggest that they will. While viruses mutate naturally and evolve over time, the researchers noted that the changes in the past two months have been more pronounced than when the pandemic started.

**The Filipino and Filipino-American communities in the Midwest, particularly those in Ohio, are advised to continue to follow guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as state and local health authorities to prevent and protect against COVID-19 infection,** including: wearing a mask; staying at home unless for essential errands; maintaining a distance of at least six feet from others and limiting face-to-face interactions; washing hands or using hand sanitizers frequently and thoroughly; refraining from touching your face, other people, and high-touch items in public places; frequently disinfecting premises and work areas; avoiding travel to places with high incidence of COVID-19; exercising, getting sufficient sleep and eating healthy food to strengthen immunity; covering nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing; and consulting a doctor if experiencing symptoms. Please take extra precautions for your and your family’s health and safety.

**Chicago, 14 January 2021**