



**Office of the National Clinical Director
Health Protection Surveillance Centre**
25-27 Middle Gardiner Street
Dublin, Ireland, D01 A4A3
Ph +353 1 8765300
ncdhp@hpsc.ie
www.hpsc.ie

17th February 2021

PQ ref 1007/20: To ask the Minister for Health the way in which different strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus are being identified and analysed; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

Nationally agreed processes have been established to identify Persons Under Investigation (those with confirmed COVID-19 infection and relevant travel history) to ensure appropriate isolation advice is given and all contacts are appropriately traced and tested, as per national guidance for Variants of Concern (VOC). This guidance is available on: https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/sars-cov-2variantsofconcern/Variants_guidance.pdf. The processes include sourcing passenger details from relevant flight manifests if cases were determined to have travelled during their infectious time period. Contact tracing is completed for all passengers who could be contacted, tests arranged, self-isolation advice and household contact advice provided.

The list of countries reporting the South African and Brazilian (P.2. variant) is growing each week. As of Feb 15th 2021 the guidance now also applies to all travellers coming to Ireland on the list of Category 2 countries, published by the Department of Health at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/be1be-list-of-high-risk-countries-as-of-12th-february-2021/> as well as to those travelling to Ireland from Brazil and South Africa.

If COVID-19 is detected and the case has a relevant travel history, samples are referred for sequencing to the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL) to check for new variants.

Weekly reports are prepared.

Based on last week's report and NVRL results up to 8th February 2021.

Confirmed 501Y.V2 cases (new in the last week): **11 (2)**

Probable cases (new in the last week): **5 (2)**

There were no confirmed cases of Brazilian P.1 (variant of concern).

Public health teams investigating incidents and outbreaks may also raise concerns about whether a new variant of concern might be implicated, and request directly that samples of concern are sequenced by the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL). Additionally, the NVRL have also confirmed over the course of the pandemic to date, Ireland has sequenced more than 1% of SARS-CoV-2 cases. This compares well by international standards.

- In week 4 of 2021, Ireland sequenced in the region of 4.5% of confirmed cases.
- In week 5 of 2021, Ireland is sequencing over 10.5% of confirmed cases.
(We are currently in week 7 of the year).

However, the need to increase sequencing capacity is acknowledged and the HPSC, HSE and the NVRL have already commenced this work.

Yours sincerely,



P.P.

Dr Abigail Collins

Consultant in Public Health Medicine / Medical Officer of Health (MCRN 404629)

Acting Clinical Lead for Acute Response, Office of the Clinical Director for Health Protection