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Press Release: For Immediate Release
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COVID-19 variants now identified in West Central Minnesota

Horizon Public Health has been notified by the Minnesota Department of Health that the B.1.1.7., B.1.427 and B.1.429 variants have been identified in the Horizon Public Health service area that includes Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens and Traverse counties. Viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. The B.1.1.7. variant was first identified in the United Kingdom in December 2020 and is now the most common version of the virus spread in the United States. The B1.427 and B.1.429 are two additional variants which were first identified in California in February 2021.

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) these variants seem to spread more easily than other variants, which may lead to more cases of COVID-19. *What does this mean?* It means that if someone is spreading the virus it has the potential to impact more people that have had contact with the person. This can lead to a more rapid increase in cases which can impact hospitalizations and could result in additional poor outcomes.

What can you do to protect yourself? We all have pandemic fatigue, but we need to still practice public health preventative measures which include:

- Choose to get vaccinated. The CDC recommends all those over the age of 16 get vaccinated. Data suggests that the COVID-19 vaccines should work against these variants.
- Wear a mask in public settings, events, and gatherings
- Maintain distancing from those who don't live with you and avoid crowds
- Wash your hands often and,
- Get tested. It is critically important to get tested and stay home when you are sick

All Minnesotans 16 and older are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. According to recent data, 50% of those 16 and older have received at least 1 dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in the counties of Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens and Traverse. Horizon Public Health together with local healthcare providers and pharmacies having been working hard to vaccinate and are continuing to hold ongoing COVID-19 vaccine clinics. To find a clinic near you, visit www.horizonpublichealth.org

For more information about the variants, please visit the CDC and the Minnesota Department of Health's website. If you have additional questions or need assistance, you can call the Horizon Public Health COVID-19 helpline at 800-450-4177 option 3, or visit our website at www.horizonpublichealth.org.

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