

VARIANTS OF CONCERN (VOC)

You may be hearing a lot about the COVID-19 Variants of Concern (VOC) - here is what you need to know right now in Saskatoon:

WHAT IS A VOC? WHY DO THEY MATTER?

- The Variants of Concern are in Saskatoon.
- They can result in more illness, hospitalizations and deaths.
- Variants are the COVID-19 virus that has changed or mutated.

This is very common with COVID-19; however, a variant becomes a Variant of Concern (VOC) when 1 or more of the following occur:

- increased transmissibility (how quickly it spreads)
- increased virulence (how sick people get)
- increased mortality (death)
- less vaccine effectiveness

Currently there are 3 Variants of Concern in Canada:

- B117 variant first identified in the UK
- B1351 variant first identified in South Africa
- P1 variant first identified in Brazil

Saskatoon currently has 2 of the 3 VOCs (B117 and B1351)

WHO IS IMPACTED?

EVERYBODY is impacted by the VOCs because they have 70% higher transmission rates and 64% higher death rates.

Just like before - we need to make sure that we do our part to keep these community members safe:

- frontline healthcare workers
- essential workers
- vulnerable sector agencies staff and clients

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Are VOCs impacting younger people more than the original COVID-19?

- Healthcare workers are reporting an increased number of younger patients showing up in hospital.
- There are a lot of people in Saskatchewan under the age of 50 and that these folks often work outside the home, have more close contacts and are at higher risk because we KNOW that the VOC is more contagious.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO TO KEEP YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS SAFE?

Right now, in Saskatoon (and across the country) We need to continue to do "what works" to prevent community transmission.

BUT we need to do them all and do them BETTER.

- Wear your well-fitted mask and avoid touching your face.
- Wash your hands and use sanitizer when you can't use soap and water.
- Keep your distance from people (minimum 2 metres or 6 feet).
- Work from home if you can.
- Keep your bubble small - follow the public health recommendations and consider limiting to your immediate household.
- Get vaccinated when your turn comes.
- Get tested: Know your COVID-19 status (the tests can detect the VOCs). Even if you don't have symptoms but you are worried about exposure - get tested!
- Stay home as much as possible - even if you are feeling well. ALWAYS Stay home if you have any symptoms.
- Limit your time spent in places with poor ventilation - particularly around others who aren't wearing a mask

PEOPLE OVER 50 WHO ARE NOT VACCINATED SHOULD NOT EXPAND THEIR BUBBLES BEYOND THEIR HOUSEHOLD



The bubble you actually have

Source: <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news/stories/Pages/2020/November/Your-Social-Bubble-What-it-is-and-why-it-matters.aspx>

WHAT ABOUT VOCS AND ISOLATION?

- We know that the VOCs are highly contagious with worse impacts.
- There is an increased likelihood of hospitalization and death - even if you are young and healthy before getting the VOC.
- You and your family are likely to have to isolate longer to protect the community.
- These isolation times could be 3 weeks or more.
- It is important to get tested as soon as you have symptoms OR suspect exposure.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE VACCINES?

- Public health officials are monitoring the effectiveness of the vaccines against the VOCs.
- Manufacturers actively are reviewing their products to confirm that they will be effective.
- Early indications are that the vaccines are effective against these VOCs.
- Vaccines are designed to decrease hospitalization and death.
- Just because you are vaccinated doesn't mean you don't have to follow the public health guidelines.

Are you wondering which vaccine is best? The first one that you can get is the best one.



ARE YOU VACCINATED?

Congratulations! Being vaccinated is a step closer to the finish line - but we aren't there yet!

Your vaccine requires 14 days to become fully effective.

After that, you are still required to follow all the recommendations to keep your family and friends safe.

Are you wondering how long you will still have to follow the rules?

- until enough people get vaccinated in Saskatoon (e.g. about 80% of people)

AND

- until the number of cases is around 30 active cases.



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