



PR#168

## PRESS RELEASE

### COVID-19 UK Variant Identified in Nasopharyngeal Swab

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The Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) has been working assiduously to protect and preserve the health of the Belizean population. It is in that regard that the Ministry informs the public that it has received 15 of the nasopharyngeal swabs that were sent to Baylor College in Houston for gene sequencing.

All 15 samples initially submitted were processed and sequenced, however, not all resulted in good sequence data. One of these samples was classified as the U.K. Variant also known as the B.1.1.7 lineage or strain 20I/501Y.V1

The U.K. Variant was identified in a man who entered Belize on January 12, 2021, as a member of the British Army Training Support Unit Belize (BATSUB). He was asymptomatic on arrival.

As a part of the MOHW and BATSUB entry protocol, all troops entering Belize must bring in a negative PCR test within 72 hours of arrival. One hundred percent of the training troops must also undergo a mandatory re-swabbing with PCR on the first day after arrival. Exercise troops must remain in complete quarantine until results are received. This process was precisely followed for the above case. The individual was isolated immediately and remained in isolation for 11 days. He was retested which yielded a negative result. At that time, he joined his battalion to continue with jungle training.

Many other public health procedures were put in place prior to the arrival of the troops and very minimal interaction with the public has occurred.

A further 40 swabs will be reported on in the near future.

The Ministry reiterates that all travelers entering Belize must bring a negative PCR or negative rapid test or be subjected to a rapid test at the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport on arrival. The public is strongly advised to continue to properly wear masks, wash hands regularly with soap and water, and continue physical distancing.

**Ends**