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## COVID-19 variants in K-12

As of February 21, the U.K. variant of COVID-19 has been identified in exposure events in five schools in Surrey and one school in Delta.

Surrey schools affected are:

- AHP Matthew Elementary
- James Ardiel Elementary
- École Woodward Hill Elementary
- Surrey Traditional Elementary
- Tamanawis Secondary

One school in Delta, Hellings Elementary, also has been identified with the U.K. variant.

Thankfully all of the 35 tests, administered at the six schools, came back negative. Referencing that layers of protection are working, the PHO is not revising guidelines at this time, although they are closely monitoring the situation and will revise guidelines, following the science.

### Variants

The COVID-19 B.1.1.7 variant, first identified in the United Kingdom, appears to make the virus more infectious, allowing it to spread more easily. There may be an increase in severity

of symptoms and mortality rates depending on the variant of the virus.

When there have been several significant mutations to the virus, it is called a variant. A variant is considered “a variant of concern” when it affects:

- disease spread
- disease severity
- tests used to detect the virus
- vaccines and treatments

### Stopping the spread

Our Early Years–K-12 members are to be commended for their commitment in keeping schools safe, while continuing to provide high quality education and care. It is more important than ever to remain vigilant in the personal efforts we are each making to stop the spread of COVID-19. This includes staying home when sick, washing hands frequently, maintaining physical distance when possible, and wearing a mask when not possible to maintain distancing.

Meanwhile, we are supporting you by successfully advocating for improvements to public health and health and safety measures, such as having school

districts provide paid time for isolation, quarantine and school closures when directed by public health; and improvements to streamline the process of exposure notification recently announced by Fraser Health. The Rapid Response Team is now in place and will begin its work liaising with districts and health authorities next week. Fraser Health has now implemented [additional protective measures](#) in response to increasing COVID-19 and variant cases in the region.

CUPE continues to work with the BC Centre for Disease Control, the B.C. government, WorkSafeBC and all K-12 stakeholder groups in reviewing and amending health and safety guidelines. As a baseline, these are the minimum standards school districts must meet and worksite specific safety plans are required to detail these measures and address enhanced responses to local circumstances.

*If you have concerns about the safety measures in your worksite, please work with your joint health and safety representatives and CUPE local to address these issues.*

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