

Coronavirus – new variant from Brazil detected in Scotland

Health protection teams are tracking cases of a new variant of Covid-19.

Three cases of a Covid-19 Variant of Concern first identified in Manaus, Brazil, have been identified in Scotland.

Following their return to North East Scotland from Brazil, via Paris and London, three Scottish residents entered self-isolation and then subsequently tested positive for Covid-19. These individuals then self-isolated for the required period of 10 days.

The tests were completed in early February and passed to the UK's advanced sequencing capabilities programme which detected this new variant. Due to the potential concerns around this variant other passengers on the flight used by the three individuals from London to Aberdeen are being contacted.

These three cases are not connected to three cases also identified in England. Health protection teams, including local clinicians, have assessed each case and their contacts, and are arranging protective measures for this small number of potentially exposed individuals.

To provide an extra layer of safety, teams are ensuring people who could have been infected by these first line contacts are also isolated and tested. This is to ensure all possible precautions are taken as we learn more about this particular

variant. Clinical and trial data continues to be assessed to examine how this new variant may respond to current Covid-19 vaccines.

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman said: "The identification of this new variant is a concern but we are taking every possible precaution. We have identified these cases thanks to our use of advanced sequencing capabilities which means we are finding more variants and mutations than many other countries and are therefore able to take action quickly.

"This new variant demonstrates how serious Covid is and reinforces the need to minimise the spread of the virus. We would encourage everyone across the country to adhere to the necessary public health restrictions by staying at home except for essential purposes as this is the single best way of staying safe and stopping the spread of this virus. It is now also illegal for anyone to travel to or from Scotland unless it is for an essential reason.

"The Covid vaccination programme is one of three key ways we are working to beat this virus, along with our expanded testing programme to identify cases and break chains of transmission, and the important lockdown restrictions everyone in Scotland must follow. These three strands – following expert advice and guidance to suppress the virus, using our expanded testing programme to identify cases and break chains of transmission and rolling out vaccination as fast as supplies allow – are the three critical actions that will see us move, step by step, to protect the public, save lives and a brighter year ahead."

The government has advised a precautionary measure and to provide further insights, samples from any passenger on the London to Aberdeen flight who subsequently tested positive or was symptomatic are being urgently sequenced to determine whether any had acquired the new variant. Those on the flight from London to Aberdeen will be contacted.