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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Whiteside County Health Department Reminds Residents to Continue Masking and Social Distancing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and Variants in Illinois.**

February 23, 2021 – Whiteside County Health Department would like to remind residents of the importance of adhering to masking and distancing recommendations while vaccine supply remains limited and COVID-19 variants are found near Whiteside County.

This month, the B.1.1.7 variant, first identified in the United Kingdom, has been found in several regions of the State including Lee County. Additionally the first Illinois case of B.1.351, first identified in South Africa, was found in Rock Island County.

Mutations can cause viruses to become easier to spread, cause more serious illness, or cause vaccine or treatments to become less effective. Early indicators are that current COVID-19 vaccines offer protection against these variants, however, information is preliminary and evolving. Following simple recommendations for keeping yourself and your community safe is the key to preventing further spread of these variants and reducing the chance of additional mutations.

Masks should be worn by individuals older than 2 years of age, if medically able, whenever you are in a public setting, around people you do not live with (including inside your home or someone else's home), and around those you live with if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or have tested positive. Evidence has repeatedly shown the [effectiveness of masking](#) at lowering transmission of COVID-19. Several studies have shown a 70% reduction in risk provided by masking. Additionally, a study of 124 Beijing households, that had 1 or more COVID positive cases, showed the risk of household transmission was reduced by 79% when the COVID positive and other household contacts masked before symptoms developed.

The effectiveness of masking is compounded when performed correctly with other mitigation measures such as social distancing and handwashing. Please help do your part by continue to protect yourself and others.

### **Please Protect Yourself, Your Family, and Your Community by:**

- **Mask-Up:** Covering your nose and mouth with a cloth face covering or surgical mask whenever you are around people who do not live in your household.
- **Wash-Up:** Frequently washing your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable.
- **Back-Up:** Keeping a minimum of 6ft between you and anyone who does not live in your household.
- **Vax-Up:** Getting vaccinated when it is your turn to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have questions please contact the IDPH COVID-19 hotline at 1-800-889-3931 or reach out to us. Additional information is also available on the [Illinois's COVID-19](#) and [CDC COVID-19](#) websites.

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