

**Kansas Department of Health and Environment Leads Rapid Response to Identification of first COVID-19 UK variant case in the state**

*Joint release from Fort Hays State University, Kansas Department of Health and Environment and Ellis County Health Department*

**\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\***

2/8/2021

HAYS, Kan.- On Wednesday, February 3, epidemiologists with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment identified the first case of the UK variant of COVID-19 in a student-athlete at Fort Hays State University. FHSU's weekly surveillance testing of student-athletes, coaches, and support staff first identified the case on January 27, which triggered immediate quarantine and contact tracing protocols. The sample provided by FHSU to KDHE was then put through a genome sequence testing process that identified the presence of the UK variant of the virus on February 3.

On February 4, KDHE began an additional layer of contact tracing given the presence of the UK variant, and on the morning of February 5, KDHE's mobile testing lab began conducting enhanced surveillance testing on the campus of Fort Hays State University. KDHE's contact tracing and follow-up testing of close contacts yielded no new case of COVID-19.

KDHE's mobile testing team, along with medical personnel from the Ellis County Health Department and the Kansas Army National Guard, administered advanced PCR testing to any members of the FHSU and local community who wanted to be tested throughout the day on Friday, February 5. The team completed 196 tests and identified one new positive case of COVID-19 from an individual who had no contact with the student-athlete who tested positive for the UK variant. This individual was contacted and tested again by Ellis County Health Department staff on February 6, and the specimen from this test is currently being analyzed by the KDHE lab in Topeka.

The rapid and robust response to the identification of the UK variant of the coronavirus by several Kansas agencies was applauded by KDHE Secretary Dr. Lee Norman, who said: "The speed at which we were able to respond and quickly test, combined with the partnership shown by the community, was excellent. However, we must remain vigilant. Now is not the time to relax the public health recommendations we know are proven to slow the spread of COVID-19. Wear a mask, wash your hands and keep your distance."

Ellis County Health Services Director Jason Kennedy credited the thoroughness of Fort Hays State University's health and safety protocols, including its robust weekly surveillance and on-demand testing programs, for quickly identifying this case on campus. "FHSU and the Ellis County Health Department have worked diligently since March to create protocols and plans that have worked well to ensure the safety of students, university employees and the community," said Kennedy.

Fort Hays State University President, Dr. Tisa Mason, pointed to the strength of the relationship between FHSU and its KDHE and Ellis County Health Department partners as pivotal in coordinating a one-day rapid response after the identification of the first UK variant case in

Kansas, stating: “Since day-one, we have been in close and ongoing contact with our local and state health and safety agency partners. We greatly value their guidance, and the success to date of our testing and health and safety protocols is due in large part to the strength of our relationships with the dedicated professionals working on the front lines to fight this pandemic.”

The Ellis County Health Department is offering free COVID-19 testing at Big Creek Crossing Mall in Hays Monday through Saturday of this week between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. FHSU’s Student Health Center conducts weekly surveillance testing with student and employee groups on campus. The center also offers free testing for members of the campus community who are experiencing symptoms associated with the coronavirus.

### Contact Information



**Ashley Jones-Wisner**

Senior Director of Public Affairs, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

[Ashley.JonesWisner@ks.gov](mailto:Ashley.JonesWisner@ks.gov)

785.296.1317



**Jason Kennedy**

Ellis County Health Services Director

[jkennedy@elliscountycan.net](mailto:jkennedy@elliscountycan.net)

785.628.9461



**FORT HAYS STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**Scott Cason**

Chief Communications Officer, Fort Hays State University

[sacason@fhsu.edu](mailto:sacason@fhsu.edu)

785.628.4208

— end —