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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To: All Media

From: Joel Strasz, Public Health Officer – Bay County Health Department

Date: April 1, 2021

Re: **COVID-19 Variant P.1 (Brazil) Identified in Bay County, BCHD and MDHHS Warn of Increased Transmission Risks During Spring Break and Easter Holiday**

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) notified the Bay County Health Department (BCHD) that the MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories identified the P.1 variant (Brazil) in a Bay County resident and it is the first known case in the State of Michigan. The confirmed case is female and the person's travel history is not known at this time. The case was originally diagnosed in early March and has subsequently recovered. Samples from the original diagnosis were sent to the Bureau of Laboratories in Lansing for genotyping and the results identifying the variant were reported yesterday.

"This is the second new variant of COVID-19 to be identified in Bay County since last week, and the rise of these new variants definitely impact the progress we have made this year with vaccinations," said Joel Strasz, Public Health Officer of the Bay County Health Department. The Bay County Health Department has investigated three cases of the B.1.1.7 (UK) variant identified since the first case was identified in the county on March 26, 2021. No cases of the 1.351 (South African) variant have been identified in Bay County to date.

Viruses constantly change and new variants are expected. The P.1 and the B.1.1.7 variants have been detected in many countries and states. Both variants are concerning because they are associated with increased transmissibility. Compared to the wild-type virus, the P.1 variant has been estimated to be approximately 2.5 times more transmissible, leading to faster spread of the virus and potentially increasing numbers of cases, hospitalizations, and potentially deaths. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention variant data, 172 P.1 cases are reported nationwide as of March 31, 2021.

"We are concerned about the discovery of another variant in Michigan," said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS Director. "It is now even more important that Michiganders continue to do what works to slow the spread of the virus by wearing their masks properly, socially distancing, avoiding crowds, washing their hands often and making a plan to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine once it is their turn. We all have a personal responsibility to slow the spread of COVID-19 and end this pandemic as quickly as possible."

The P.1 variant was first identified in travelers from Brazil, who were tested during routine screening at an airport in Japan, in early January. It was first detected in the US at the end of January 2021. This

variant contains a set of additional mutations that may affect its ability to be recognized by antibodies from previous infections and may increase the chance of reinfection.

These strains continue to be closely investigated. So far, studies suggest that currently authorized vaccines in the United States recognize and are effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization and deaths related to these known variants.

With the high transmission rate of the variants and with Spring Break and the Easter holiday upon us, vaccination is more important than ever. Bay County residents should get vaccinated as soon as it is offered to them. At this time, the COVID-19 vaccines appear to be effective against the variant. Actions to protect yourself and others from the variants include:

- Getting vaccinated for COVID-19 as soon as it is available to you.
- Wearing a mask around others.
- Staying six feet apart from others.
- Washing hands often.
- Ventilating indoor spaces.

The Bay County Health Department will continue to prioritize registrants 50 years of age and older, but will accept as many of the current age categories as allowed by the State of Michigan. [All Bay County residents, aged 16 and older are encouraged to register](#) and will be sent appointment invitations for other BCHD sponsored clinics in the future.

Please do your part and help minimize the spread of COVID-19. For the latest and most accurate information regarding the COVID-19 please go to the Bay County Health Department website at <https://www.baycounty-mi.gov/Health/COVID19/>.