University of New Hampshire
UNH TODAY

Sequencing Variants

With NIH grant, UNH will help understand COVID-19 variants

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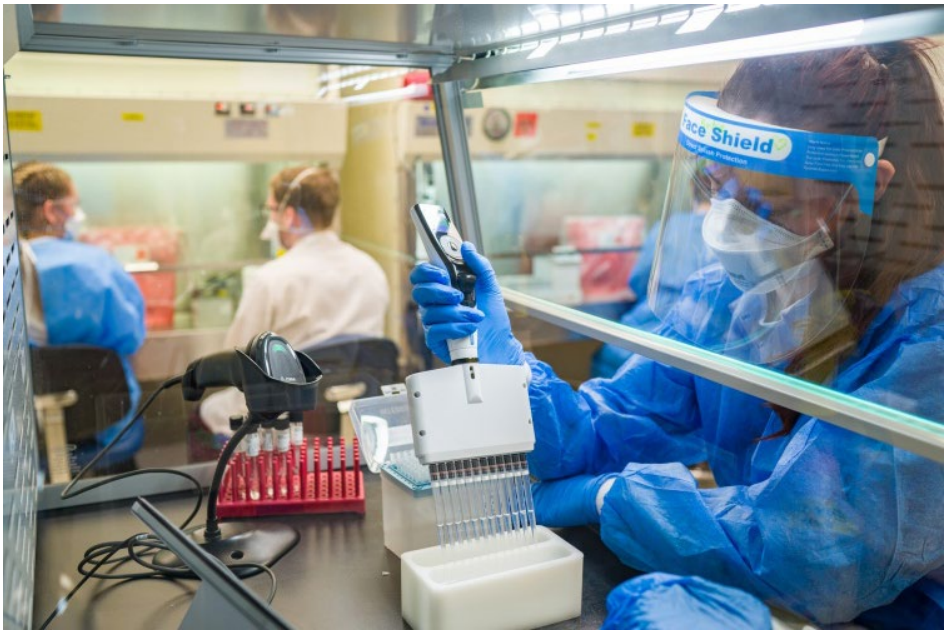

As COVID variants march steadily through the Greek alphabet, UNH has received new funding from the National Institutes of Health to continue its genomic surveillance of COVID-19 variants in New Hampshire. The work could lead to better understanding of how specific variants increase transmissibility of the virus, evade the immune systems of those previously infected or increase severity of symptoms.

"As the highly transmissible

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Omicron subvariant BA.5 becomes the predominant strain of COVID in the nation, understanding variants at a genomic level is more relevant than ever."

predominant strain of COVID in the nation, understanding variants at a genomic level is more relevant than ever," says W. Kelley Thomas, professor and director of UNH's Hubbard Center for Genome Studies and scientific director of UNH's acclaimed COVID-19 test lab.

With the grant to UNH's Center of Integrated Biomedical and Bioengineering Research — $790,000 from the NIH's National Institute of General Medical Sciences — researchers will sequence approximately 5,000 COVID samples collected from positive tests from UNH, the state Department of Health and Human Services, and Dartmouth College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

"This collaboration leveraging expertise at UNH, Dartmouth and the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center will be critical to our efforts to manage the ongoing presence of COVID in New Hampshire," says Dr. Fengxiang Gao, chief of the Bureau of Public Health Laboratories for the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition, UNH will evaluate whether genomic surveillance of wastewater can serve as a sentinel for SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks at the community level. Paula Mouser, an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at UNH who has led COVID-19 wastewater surveillance efforts at UNH and surrounding communities, will collaborate with Thomas on this aspect of the research.

WRITTEN Beth Potier | Communications and Public Affairs |

BY: beth.potier@unh.edu | 2-1566

PHOTOGRAPHER: Jeremy Gasowski | Communications and Public Affairs | jeremy.gasowski@unh.edu | 603-862-4465

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