

U.S. confirms first case of Brazil COVID-19 variant

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COVID-19 information is displayed on a screen in South Ferry Station in New York. (Photo: Eduardo Munoz / Reuters)

Minneapolis, January 25 (RHC)-- The United States has reported its first known case of the COVID-19 variant first detected in Brazil. The Minnesota Department of Health confirmed the case on Monday, the same day President Joe Biden extended coronavirus restrictions barring most non-U.S. citizens who recently travelled to Brazil, South Africa and several European countries from entering the United States.

The variant of the novel coronavirus known as P1 was detected in a specimen from a Minnesota resident with recent travel history to Brazil, the state's health department said in a statement. The agency said it marks the first documented instance of the P1 variant in the United States.

While the so-called "Brazil variant" is thought to be more transmissible than the initial strain of the virus that causes COVID-19, it is not known whether the illness it causes is more severe.

President Joe Biden has promised to launch a fierce fight against COVID-19 in the US, which has recorded the most cases and coronavirus-related deaths in the world. "With the pandemic worsening and more contagious variants spreading, this isn't the time to be lifting restrictions on international travel," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said at a news briefing earlier in the day about the renewed travel restrictions.

The U.S. has registered more than 25 million infections – around one-quarter of global cases – as well as more than 420,000 deaths since the pandemic began, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

The new head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned on the weekend that coronavirus-related deaths in the U.S. could surpass 500,000 by next month. The CDC and US State Department also announced that as of Tuesday, all travellers coming into the U.S. will need to show a negative COVID-19 test before boarding their flights. That includes U.S. citizens and foreign nationals.

"The Department and the CDC continue to strongly recommend U.S. citizens reconsider travel abroad, and postpone all non-essential travel," they said in a statement on Monday.

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