



GOVERNMENT OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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COVID-19: Status Update in the U.S. Virgin Islands

ST. CROIX, USVI (March 2, 2020) —The Virgin Islands Department of Health has been monitoring the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) since initial reports of an outbreak of respiratory illness was first identified in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. Since the initial transmission in China, the infection has progressed rapidly to other locations. As the number of patients affected increases and the science surrounding COVID-19 develops, so does the Federal Guidelines on the testing criteria. The Department of Health continues to closely monitor guidelines for updates and take necessary precautions to best protect Virgin Island residents.

Most recently, the testing criteria has been widened to include severe respiratory cases that did not travel to affected areas. It is also important to note that influenza activity is also at high levels and may present with similar symptoms. **Currently, there are NO confirmed cases in the Virgin Islands.** However, under the widened surveillance guidance the DOH expects that there will be an increase in the number of specimens to be tested. There are currently three specimens that have been submitted for testing and are considered Persons Under Investigation (PUIs). None of these PUIs has been confirmed and all guidance is being followed to avoid potential transmission to others. In accordance with the law and in order to protect patient’s rights, no additional public health information (PHI) on these or future PUIs will be provided. The DOH will continue to regularly update the number of PUIs and report any confirmed cases.

It is critical that clinicians and our community assist in these efforts. The current guidelines for testing included below provide an outline of the current requirements for testing and epidemiologic risk information for PUIs.

Clinical Features	&	Epidemiologic Risk
Fever ¹ or signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath)	AND	Any person, including healthcare workers ² , who has had close contact ³ with a

Clinical Features	&	Epidemiologic Risk
		laboratory-confirmed ⁴ COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset
Fever ¹ and signs/symptoms of a lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath) requiring hospitalization	AND	A history of travel from affected geographic areas ⁵ (see below) within 14 days of symptom onset
Fever ¹ with severe acute lower respiratory illness (e.g., pneumonia, ARDS) requiring hospitalization and without alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza) ⁶	AND	No source of exposure has been identified

The Epidemiology Division, led by Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, is monitoring the novel coronavirus outbreak closely, conducting surveillance, and will assist with laboratory testing and contact tracing as needed to quickly contain any possible cases.

The Department of Health has shared guidance based on the public health response from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and has provided training to staff at the Juan F. Luis Hospital and the Schneider Regional Medical Center as well as on-person training to all clinics across the territory.

Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion reminds residents that while COVID-19 should be taken seriously, residents should also take precaution to avoid the spread of influenza by getting the flu vaccine, washing hands with soap and water, covering your nose and mouth when coughing and using a flexed elbow when sneezing, and avoiding close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms. As with the flu, those most susceptible to severe disease are our elderly population. Commissioner Encarnacion also wants to assure the public that the DOH is working with other government agencies, hospitals and private entities to secure the health and safety of the population within the territory.

Department of Tourism Director of Communications Alani Henneman-Todman stated that Tourism is also closely monitoring the situation and will continue to be in close dialogue with the Health Department. “While we promote tourism and encourage travel to and from the Virgin Islands, we encourage travelers to take precaution with their health and the health of others and to follow Department of Health guidelines,” stated Henneman-Todman.

The Virgin Islands Port Authority is also in close communication with the Health Department and has received guidance on the outbreak of COVID-19.

If you or someone you know has traveled to a location with human to human transmission of COVID-19 within 14 days of becoming ill with fever and respiratory symptoms call ahead before going to see a doctor or emergency room and tell them your symptoms and where you traveled from. To report a suspect case, call the Department of Health’s Epidemiology Division at 340-718-1311 x3891 or 340-774-7477 x5647.

The Department of Health will continue to monitor the outbreak.

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