

Image not found or type unknown

Coronavirus: Here's How to Protect Yourself and Others

Top Stories / **Published On March 10, 2020 05:34 AM /**

Staff Consortium **March 10, 2020**

Image not found or type unknown



First, we are not yet aware of any confirmed cases of coronavirus disease (COVID19) in the U.S. Virgin Islands or anywhere in the Caribbean outside of the Dominican Republic.

But with new testing kits that allow the VI Department of Health to test locally for the fast-spreading virus, the potential for a spike in "Persons Under Investigation" and potential cases is very real.

As this potential global pandemic unfolds, the most important thing we all can do is learn all we can about this disease and take steps to prevent it from spreading in our communities.

The Consortium has compiled some information about the spread of COVID19 so far, and about federal and territorial resources, and the actions taken locally to address the outbreak. We hope it helps to keep you and your family safer and healthier going forward.

How COVID19 Spreads

The coronavirus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within a few feet), or through droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID19 by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but it is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are the sickest, but some spread might be possible before symptoms are apparent. There have been reports of this with COVID19, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Symptoms

For confirmed COVID19 cases, reported illnesses have ranged from mild to severe symptoms, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. The CDC believes that symptoms could appear between 2-14 days after exposure.

Public health officials are asking people to cut down on shaking hands.

The World Health Organization recommends the following basic protective measures:

Wash Your Hands Frequently

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

Maintain Social Distancing

Maintain at least a 3 foot distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth

Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

Practice Respiratory Hygiene

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

Why? Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID19.

If You Have a Fever, Cough and Difficulty breathing, Seek Medical Attention. But Call First.

Stay home if you feel sick. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention — but do not just go to the emergency room or the doctor's office. First, call your physician or health care provider for guidance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.

Why? Public health authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

Stay Informed

Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-9. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, and national and local public health authorities on how to protect yourself and others from COVID19.

The VI Department of Health is offering push notifications to your mobile phone about the territory's response to coronavirus. For that service, text the word COVID19USVI to 888777. Once you send the text, you are automatically enrolled to VITEMA's messaging system for coronavirus updates, according to a test performed by the Consortium.

Residents can also call the Dept. of Health at the following:

- St. Croix: 340-718-1311
- St. Thomas: 340-774-900 or 340-774-7477
- St. John: 340-776-6400

Information is also available at the health department website at www.doh.vi.gov/coronavirus.

World Health Organization information on the virus can be found at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>