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First Case of Coronavirus Confirmed in U.S. Virgin Islands

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The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health late Friday announced its first confirmed case of COVID-19 disease, the new coronavirus. The territory's first case is a resident with some recent international travel history to one of the five locations with widespread transmission of the disease.

The case has also been confirmed to be on St. Croix, according to people with first-hand knowledge of the matter.

Health officials said they have been closely monitoring the global outbreak and building capacity to respond to a positive case in the territory.

“The Center for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed today at 4:00 p.m. confirmed that we now have a positive, confirmed case of COVID-19 disease in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We must continue to remain vigilant. If you are experiencing flu like symptoms and have traveled to China, Iran, South Korea, Europe or Japan in the last 14 days, please self-quarantine and call(340)712-6299or(340)776-1519," the Department of Health said.

"By practicing good hand and respiratory hygiene, we can all protect ourselves from COVID-19 and even influenza (the flu) which is affecting our our community. Most of all, protect your loved ones over 65 yrs", stated Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

The department's Epidemiology Division continues to conduct testing for cases that meet the Person Under Investigation (PUI) criteria, conduct contact tracing, and to assist healthcare providers and the public with up-to-date education as to what to do to prevent additional cases, the department said.

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis added, "Within the Epidemiology Division we are doing everything possible to flatten the epidemiological curve, which decreases the case load at any one time and allows healthcare facilities time and the ability to respond. If you are sick, it is critical that you stay home. We are urging the public to only go to the emergency room if you are in need of emergency care due to the severity of your illness."

The Department of Health said the current risk of transmission in the V.I. remains low for most residents, but precautions should shall be taken to avoid transmission within the community. A person may also get COVID-19 by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes, D.O.H. said.

To avoid the virus and help prevent its spread, Department of Health officials recommend these steps:

- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible.
- Stay home if sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue. Wash hands immediately. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60 percent alcohol.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently recommends avoiding non-essential travel to China, Iran, Japan, South Korea and Europe, as well as no cruise ship travel. Older adults and those with underlying health issues are particularly vulnerable and should avoid crowded places and non-essential air travel to decrease their risk for virus transmission.

COVID-19 symptoms reported include fever, cough and shortness of breath. It spreads mostly between people who are in close contact via respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Persons who have contracted COVID-19 are most likely to spread it when they are most symptomatic. This means they are more likely to spread it to others when they are sick.

If you or a loved one are showing coronavirus symptoms and have recently traveled to an area with person-to- person spread, or been in contact with someone with coronavirus, you should contact the Department of Health at 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519. You will be given instructions on what to do next and that may include isolating yourself from others.

If you have medical emergency, call 911 and let them know if you have been infected or you believe that you may be.

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