

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DOH Completes Lead Testing Pilot with All Negative Results; Wider Effort Starts Monday

Initial Testing Phase Yields Optimistic Outcomes: Zero Lead Exposure Found in Children; New Phase Aims to Test 1,000 on St. Croix

Health / **Published On November 05, 2023 01:17 PM /**

Staff Consortium **November 05, 2023**



An Alfredo Andrews Elementary School student is tested for lead in the blood. By. V.I. DEPT. OF HEALTH

Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms has reported the successful wrap-up of a pilot lead testing initiative within the territory's schools. The initiative, termed "Safe Haven – A Lead-Free Families Initiative," involved the testing of 64 students from Alfredo Andrews Elementary School spanning Granny Pre-K to the second grade. Officials have confirmed that all tested students showed no signs of lead in their blood.

The initiative, orchestrated by the department's Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases divisions, aims to protect vulnerable demographics amidst rising concerns over lead exposure. With the pilot phase concluded, Dr. Craigwell-Syms disclosed plans to broaden the testing program to include the broader demographic of children aged zero to six throughout St. Croix, starting November 6. This expanded testing aims to screen 1,000 children to establish a baseline for current lead exposure levels as the region strides toward a lead-free environment.

Parents and guardians interested in availing of the free pediatric lead testing service can visit the Community Health van, stationed beside the department's Estate Richmond modulars in Christiansted. The service operates from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and requires pre-registration through the department's Lead Testing Gateway portal.

"Offering pediatric lead testing to the general population of zero-to-six-year-olds is a crucial step in ensuring the public health and safety of our community," said Craigwell-Syms. "By identifying lead exposure early, we can take necessary steps to prevent adverse health effects in children."

The department underscores the fact that lead poisoning can be asymptomatic, making blood tests essential for detecting exposure. The initial screening involves a simple finger-prick test to determine lead levels in the blood. Should this test indicate exposure, the department will take immediate action to advise the child's parents or guardians on further testing.

While the department focuses on pediatric testing, it recommends that others, including pregnant women, seek lead testing through their private healthcare providers or community health centers.

This health initiative follows closely on the heels of Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s declaration of a State of Emergency on October 30 for St. Croix. This declaration comes in response to elevated lead and copper levels detected in the island's drinking water and is a step toward securing federal assistance. The Department of Health said it is working in conjunction with several other territorial agencies to lead the response to this urgent health matter.

Residents seeking more information or experiencing health issues related to lead exposure are encouraged to reach out to the department's hotlines during business hours for support.