

## 7 Lead Poisoning Cases Detected in St. Croix Children, Confirmation Pending

**Pediatric lead screening unveils potential cases, awaiting further analysis**

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Seven cases of potential lead exposure have been detected among children in St. Croix, the V.I. Dept. of Health confirmed to the Consortium Tuesday evening. This latest development has prompted heightened attention from D.O.H.'s Epidemiology Division.

As part of a critical health initiative following the discovery of high levels of lead and copper in WAPA-supplied water, the department has been conducting targeted pediatric lead testing. So far, 185 students aged six and under from both public and private schools have been tested. The initial testing, which uses a finger-prick method to assess lead content in the blood, has identified seven children with possible lead poisoning. These cases are currently awaiting further confirmation

through a follow-up venous blood draw.

This effort forms a part of the department's proactive response to the water contamination crisis on St. Croix. The primary focus of this week's activities has been on the youngest and most vulnerable segment of the population, where the impact of lead exposure can be most severe. DOH says it remains committed to addressing and mitigating the potential health risks posed by lead and copper contamination in the island's water supply.

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis highlighted the community's response: "Since announcing last week that the V.I. Department of Health would accommodate requests from parent-teacher organizations to provide lead testing on campus, six schools have asked that the service be provided on-site," she said. "As of this week, we are testing at two sites daily - at our home base and at a school."

The schedule for the next seven days of testing includes various elementary schools and the Department of Health's modulars in Estate Richmond.

Parents or guardians looking to have their children tested must first register and give consent on D.O.H.'s registration portal, [Lead Testing Gateway](#).

The importance of these tests is underscored by the fact that lead poisoning may not always be visible through signs or symptoms, particularly in children under six, who are at a critical stage of development. Lead exposure can adversely affect their brain, nervous system, growth, development, and overall behavior.

As part of the department's "Safe Haven— A Lead-Free Families Initiative," the goal is to test 1,000 children on St. Croix to establish a baseline of current exposure levels.

In response to this health concern, D.O.H. has requested and received assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A team, including two epidemiologists, two laboratorians, a communications specialist, and a team lead, is currently assisting with this initiative.

Residents with health concerns related to lead exposure and testing can reach out to the Poison Control Center or the Department of Health hotlines. The ongoing efforts of the Department of Health are a significant step towards ensuring the health and safety of St. Croix's children.