

V.I. Dept. of Health Rolls Out Lead Screening in St. Thomas-St. John District

St. Thomas-St. John District to undergo lead exposure tests for children

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The V.I. Department of Health announced Wednesday that its Epidemiology and Laboratory Divisions are expanding pediatric lead screening to the St. Thomas-St. John District.

D.O.H. said the initiative is part of its comprehensive “Safe Haven – Lead-Free Families” program, targeting children aged 0 to 6 years, a group particularly vulnerable to lead exposure.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion emphasized the importance of this initiative, stating, “While we are confident about the safety of the Territory’s public water system, it's crucial to identify other potential lead sources like paint, toys, and jewelry. This comprehensive screening in

St. Thomas-St. John District will help us gain a complete understanding and guide our future efforts to mitigate lead exposure.”

The screening schedule for the St. Thomas-St. John District includes various schools and educational institutions on specific dates, starting from January 30th through mid-February.

The screening schedule is as follows:

- January 30th at VI Montessori School and Peter Gruber International Academy.
- January 31st at Yvonne Milliner Bowsky Elementary.
- February 1st at Joseph Sibilly Elementary/Sugar Apple Pre-K.
- February 2nd at Joseph Gomez Elementary.
- February 5th at Ula F. Muller Elementary.
- February 6th at Julius E. Sprauve Elementary.
- February 7th at Lockhart Elementary.
- February 8th at Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School.
- February 14th at Newton Academy, Minds in Motion, Sunbeam Preschool, Sunshine Bear Daycare and Preschool, UVI Inclusive Child Care.
- February 15th at Beyond Bright Daycare and Handy Spandy Preschool.

The initiative will involve a simple finger-prick test, and if necessary, follow-up testing through a venous blood draw. Parental consent is required for testing, which is provided at no cost.

The program aims to detect and address lead poisoning, which often shows no visible signs or symptoms, especially in children under six years of age. Lead exposure can adversely affect children’s brain, nervous system, growth, development, and behavior.

Following the success of screening over 1,000 children in St. Croix, the department aims to replicate this achievement in the St. Thomas-St. John District. To date, three individuals have been confirmed positive for lead in the blood in St. Croix.

In addition to the screening, the department is also expanding its “Boots on the Ground” outreach program to the St. Thomas-St. John District in partnership with the VI Housing Authority. This effort is part of the response to the State of Emergency declared in October to address possible lead and copper contamination in the public water system. Comprehensive water sampling in St. Croix has shown low to undetectable levels of lead in the potable water system.

Governor Albert Bryan recently announced the [lifting of the "No Drink Advisory"](#) for St. Croix’s public water system during his sixth State of the Territory Address.

For more information on lead exposure and the screening program, residents can contact the Poison Control Center or the V.I. D.O.H. Hotline at 1-800-222-1222.