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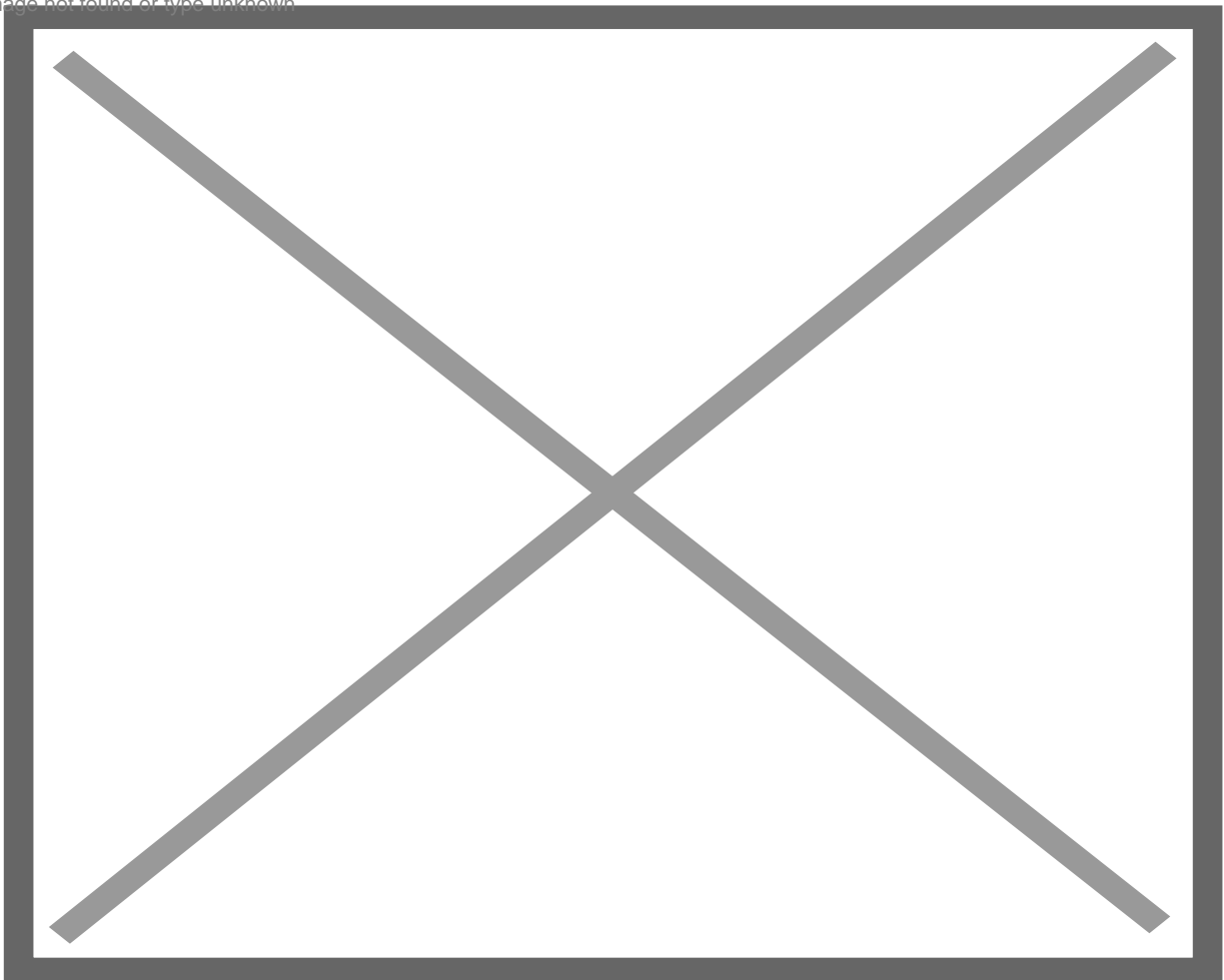
Virgin Islands Halts Free Covid-19 Testing

With federal funding depleted, the territory transitions to private testing solutions amid low case numbers

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With federal funds for the program exhausted, the V.I. Department of Health announced on Monday that the territory's free Covid-19 testing program would be discontinued along with the Covid-19 hotline that was established at the height of the pandemic.

The move is in line with public health policy that shifts the perspective of the viral disease from an emerging threat to an endemic pathogen in human populations.

The territory's Covid burden, according to Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, remains light. "Our reported cases have remained low with minimal hospitalizations," she said in the press statement. "However, Covid is likely here to stay and similar to managing the influenza virus,

prevention involves annual vaccination and proactive measures to curb transmission.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday [released new guidelines](#) that align Covid-19 precautions with those for influenza and other respiratory viruses.

The territory-wide testing effort encompassed over 500,000 tests which resulted in the identification of over 26,000 active Covid-19 infections. To date, 133 people have died in the Virgin Islands from the virus.

Now that the territorial testing program has ended, anyone who suspects they may have Covid should visit a private laboratory or their healthcare provider for testing, says territorial epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis. Home test kits, widely available at local pharmacies, are also an option, she said.

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