

Dengue Surging in St. Thomas-St. John District, DOH Urges Precautions

With 82 cases reported territory-wide, including 63 on St. Thomas, health officials advise residents to eliminate standing water, use mosquito repellent, and get tested to prevent further spread of the disease

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An announcement from the Department of Health on Monday has advised that residents take immediate precautions in the face of a surge of dengue cases in the St. Thomas-St. John district.?

"To date we have 82 reported cases of dengue in the Territory and we are once again strongly urging residents to take steps now to prevent wider transmission," said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. "Remove standing water from around your home, repair your window screens if

there are holes or tears, and use mosquito repellent when outdoors. These simple steps significantly reduce the risk of dengue."?

Other proactive measures include wearing lightweight, loose fitting long sleeves and long pants, tightly covering water storage containers, and repairing cracks or gaps in cisterns and septic tanks.

With 63 reported cases on St. Thomas, 18 on St. John and one case on St. Croix, territorial epidemiologist Esther Ellis said that there is still cause for concern on the Big Island. "We are aware that our numbers on St. Croix are under-estimating our true dengue burden, and I encourage residents to get tested for dengue if you have symptoms," she said.

Standing water caused by recent heavy rains makes a conducive environment for mosquito breeding, Dr. Ellis noted. The surge, according to DOH, comes amid a worldwide high water mark for the disease. "The global incidence of dengue this year has been the highest on record," the department said in its announcement.

Chief Medical Officer Tai Hunte-Cesar said those experiencing symptoms of dengue, including eye, muscle, bone and joint pain, as well as fever, nausea, rash, and headache, should get tested to confirm whether they have dengue or some other illness. "We know the numbers of cases are far higher than what is recorded because people do not always seek care allowing for testing and accurate diagnosing."

In addition to underestimated case numbers due to the lack of testing, Dr. Hunter-Caesar also noted the risk from false negatives. "It is important to tell your provider the exact onset of symptoms, so they perform the appropriate test," she advised.?

The DOH Epidemiology Division's recently launched data dashboard tracks incidents of dengue and COVID-19 cases in the territory, and provides weekly updates.