

Image not found or type unknown

## 138 Reported Dengue Cases in USVI as Health Department Mobilizes with CDC and Puerto Rico to Combat Underreported Outbreak

Health officials fear the number of cases is higher due to underreporting as teams target high-risk areas with community outreach and mosquito control efforts to prevent severe symptoms and further transmission.

Health / **Published On October 15, 2024 04:45 PM /**

Staff Consortium **October 15, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



The V.I. Dept. of Health announced Tuesday that it has launched an aggressive effort to combat the dengue outbreak currently impacting the territory, with a particular focus on the St. Thomas-St. John district.

According to the release, the department's Epidemiology Division is working in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Puerto Rico Department of Health's Vector Control Unit to curb the spread of the mosquito-borne virus.

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis confirmed the mobilization of teams to tackle the outbreak. "In response to the outbreak, the Department of Health has mobilized teams in the St. Thomas-St. John District," she said. "These teams, in collaboration with the CDC and Puerto Rico Vector Control Unit, began working today to control the spread of dengue through community outreach and mosquito control efforts."

The effort will focus on high-risk areas identified as Smith's Bay, Anna's Retreat, Charlotte Amalie Estate, and Bovoni on St. Thomas, and Fish Bay on St. John, DOH said. A high-risk zone is classified as any area where more than five confirmed dengue cases have been reported. The outreach teams will inspect residential areas, apply larvicides in these zones, and educate the public on effective mosquito bite prevention and mosquito breeding control measures.

Outreach activities are set to continue until November 8, and residents are being urged to cooperate by taking preventive measures, such as using insect repellents and eliminating standing water, which serves as breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion expressed gratitude for the assistance provided by the CDC and Puerto Rican health officials. "We truly appreciate the support of the CDC and the Puerto Rico team, which has been fighting a dengue outbreak in Puerto Rico since March of this year," Encarnacion stated. "Our goal is to contain this outbreak here and prevent further transmission and illness across the territory."

The U.S. Virgin Islands is currently grappling with 138 reported dengue cases: 97 in St. Thomas, 37 in St. John, and 4 in St. Croix. Health officials believe, however, that the number of cases is likely higher due to undiagnosed and unreported cases. The dengue virus is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which thrives in the current weather conditions. As such, public education on how to protect against the virus is considered critical to stemming its spread.

Dengue symptoms range from mild to severe and can include fever, eye pain, muscle or joint pain, nausea, vomiting, and rash. These symptoms typically last between two and seven days, with most people recovering within a week. Health officials are urging those who experience symptoms to consult their primary care physician and request a blood test to confirm the virus. It is important to rest and take acetaminophen for fever relief, but to avoid medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen, which can exacerbate bleeding risks.

Approximately one in 20 dengue cases can develop into severe dengue, which poses heightened risks for infants, pregnant women, and those who have previously contracted the virus. Severe dengue typically occurs one to two days after the fever subsides and includes symptoms such as severe abdominal pain, vomiting, bleeding, or extreme fatigue. In such cases, immediate medical attention is advised.

To track the number of dengue cases in the territory, the public can visit the Department of Health's Epidemiology Data Dashboard at [www.doh.vi.gov](http://www.doh.vi.gov).

In addition to its dengue response, DOH is reminding the public that the chikungunya vaccine is available throughout October. Chikungunya is also transmitted by mosquitoes and shares similar symptoms with dengue, including severe joint pain, swelling, muscle pain, headache, fever, rash, and fatigue.

"With the community already facing a dengue outbreak, the availability of the chikungunya vaccine is a timely opportunity to boost public health and prevent further illness," stated Dr. Ellis.

The chikungunya vaccine, known as IXCHIQ, is a single-dose vaccine approved for adults aged 18 and older. It is available at the following Department of Health Community Health Clinic locations:

- St. Croix: 2nd Floor, former Caribe Home Center Building, Castle Coakley, Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (No appointment necessary).
- St. Thomas: 2nd Floor, Schneider Regional Medical Center, Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information, residents can contact the St. Thomas clinic at (340) 774-7477 or the St. Croix clinic at (340) 712-0131.

© Viconsortium 2024