

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Health Officials Warn of Rising Dengue Cases on St. Croix, Urge Preventative Measures

Health officials warn of rising dengue cases on St. Croix, with 15 confirmed infections in 2025. DOH urges residents to eliminate standing water, use mosquito repellent, and seek medical attention if symptoms arise, as prevention efforts intensify.

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The V.I. Department of Health is urging residents to take immediate precautions as the number of dengue virus cases rises on St. Croix. Health officials have confirmed 15 cases in 2025, all occurring on the island, with samples collected from St. Croix ProHealth, Juan F. Luis Hospital, and Frederiksted Health Care Inc.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion is calling on residents to eliminate standing water, repair window screens, and use mosquito repellent to help curb the spread of the virus. "We are once again strongly urging residents to take steps now to prevent wider transmission," she emphasized. "These simple steps significantly reduce the risk of dengue."

To combat the spread, DOH said it has mobilized teams in the St. Croix district to inspect schools, apply larvicides in high-risk zones, and educate the public on mosquito control and bite prevention.

Dengue is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which thrives in rainy conditions. The virus can cause symptoms ranging from mild fever to severe illness, with some cases becoming life-threatening.

According to DOH Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, the most common symptoms of dengue include:

- Fever
- Pain behind the eyes
- Muscle, joint, or bone pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Skin rash

Symptoms typically last two to seven days, with most people recovering within a week. Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar, Chief Medical Officer for VIDO, advises individuals experiencing these symptoms to seek medical attention immediately.

"It is important to tell your provider the exact onset of symptoms so they can perform the appropriate test and avoid false negative results," she explained. "This is the only way we can accurately track the rate of dengue in our community."

Dr. Ellis also warned that dengue cases on St. Croix may be underreported, urging residents to get tested if they exhibit symptoms.

Certain groups are at higher risk for severe dengue, including infants, pregnant women, and individuals with prior dengue infections. Severe cases can develop 24 to 48 hours after fever subsides and may include severe abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, internal bleeding, or extreme fatigue. Residents experiencing these symptoms should seek emergency medical care immediately.

DOH Epidemiology Division has established a dengue hotline for residents seeking information on protection and prevention. The hotline is available at (340) 725-5389 or (340) 774-7477 ext. 5647, with representatives available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Additionally, the department has launched the USVI Epidemiology Data Dashboard, which provides real-time updates on dengue, influenza, COVID-19, and wastewater cases in the territory. Residents can access the dashboard at www.doh.vi.gov under the "USVI Epidemiology Data Dashboard" section.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued guidelines to help residents prevent mosquito bites and reduce mosquito populations:

- Use EPA-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone.
- Wear long sleeves, long pants, and use repellent on exposed skin.
- Follow repellent instructions carefully, especially for children.
- Avoid using insect repellent on infants younger than two months old; instead, cover their arms and legs and use mosquito netting over cribs, strollers, and carriers.
- Do not use oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or para-menthane-diol (PMD) on children under three years old.
- Apply repellent to your hands first, then apply to a child's face to avoid contact with eyes, mouth, and cuts.

To reduce mosquito populations around homes, the CDC recommends:

- Repairing holes in window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out.
- Eliminating standing water weekly in containers such as buckets, tires, planters, toys, birdbaths, and trash cans.
- Covering water storage containers, like rain barrels and cisterns, with wire mesh to prevent mosquitoes from laying eggs.
- Filling tree holes and repairing cracks in septic tanks to prevent water accumulation.
- Covering open plumbing pipes and vents with wire mesh or mosquito netting.

The CDC issued a Health Advisory in June 2024 due to a record number of dengue cases worldwide, making 2024 the highest global incidence of dengue on record. In April 2024, Puerto Rico declared a State of Emergency due to dengue, and the island continues to report high case numbers.

For more information on dengue symptoms, prevention, and treatment, residents can visit the CDC's official dengue page at www.cdc.gov/dengue.