

## DOH Reports 189 Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease Cases on St. Thomas, Urges Precautions

The V.I. Department of Health confirms 189 cases of HFMD on St. Thomas and one on St. Croix, urging strict hygiene and infection control. Schools and daycares are advised to enhance cleaning efforts, though closures are not recommended.

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The V.I. Department of Health on Friday issued a public alert as Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD) continues to spread among children in the territory, with the majority of cases concentrated on St. Thomas. To date, 189 cases have been reported on the island, while one case has been confirmed on St. Croix.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion urged parents, caregivers, daycare centers, and schools to take immediate precautions to reduce the spread of this highly contagious virus.

"Since our initial advisory, the department has received significant reports of additional cases of HFMD," Ms. Encarnacion stated. "I am strongly urging parents, caregivers, daycares, and schools to take the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of this highly contagious virus."

While no HFMD cases have been reported by healthcare providers or childcare facilities on St. John, Encarnacion cautioned that this does not necessarily mean the island is free of the virus.

"But that does not mean that there are no cases in St. John," she said. "Data from healthcare providers and other sources does not always include the home addresses of young children with confirmed cases of HFMD. Some may reside in St. John but travel to St. Thomas for care."

HFMD is a common viral illness that primarily affects children under five years old. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Painful mouth sores that may blister
- A rash on the hands and feet

The virus is typically self-limiting, with most individuals recovering within seven to ten days without medical intervention. However, HFMD spreads easily through respiratory droplets, contaminated surfaces, fluid from blisters, and stool of infected individuals.

There is no specific cure for HFMD, but the DOH recommends supportive care measures to ease discomfort:

- Staying hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids
- Taking over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever and discomfort
- Using soothing mouth rinses or sprays to relieve throat pain
- Ensuring adequate rest to support recovery

To curb the spread of the virus, the DOH Epidemiology Division is working directly with affected schools and daycare centers, providing phone consultations, in-person visits, and infection control training.

Parents and caregivers are urged to follow these preventative measures:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet, or coughing/sneezing.
- Help young children clean their hands properly and keep blisters clean.
- Avoid touching the face with unwashed hands, particularly the eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as toys, doorknobs, and countertops using a bleach solution (1 gallon of water mixed with ¼ cup of bleach).
- Limit close contact with infected individuals, including hugging and kissing.

Dr. Esther Ellis, the Territorial Epidemiologist, assured that school closures are not necessary for HFMD outbreaks. Instead, she stressed the importance of enhanced hand hygiene and thorough environmental cleaning in schools and daycare facilities.

The department "does not recommend closures for HFMD," Dr. Ellis stated. "Instead, we recommend enhanced hand hygiene protocols and environmental cleaning efforts for all schools and childcare settings."

The DOH Epidemiology Division continues to monitor the outbreak closely and will provide updates as necessary. Schools and healthcare providers are encouraged to report new cases of HFMD by emailing [epi@doh.vi.gov](mailto:epi@doh.vi.gov).

Residents experiencing symptoms or seeking additional guidance should contact their healthcare provider for further assistance.

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