

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Second Virgin Islander Infected with COVID-19 Has Died, According to Public Health Officials

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A second person infected with COVID-19 disease caused by the coronavirus has died on St. Thomas, the V.I. Department of Health announced on Friday. The deceased is a 72-year-old woman who had been hospitalized for the past two weeks at Schneider Regional Medical Center, said Gov. Albert Bryan at regular Government House COVID-19 update.

VI Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said the deceased contracted the virus through community spread, which means health officials do not know exactly how or where the infection occurred.

The total number of positive cases of COVID-19 remained at 51 as of Friday afternoon. Negative test results climbed to 373. A total of 458 people have been tested, according to the VIDOH. Thirty-four test results are pending. The number of tests administered increased by 27 over the last 24 hours.

While the number of positive cases has remained stable over the last six days, Mr. Bryan said the territory has not reached the expected peak of the spread. "We were always predicting that the surge would be a little bit later. ... We're not really safe until our feeder cities - Miami, New York, North Carolina, Atlanta, New Jersey start to peak."

Both tragic COVID-19 deaths in the territory involved elderly victims. An 85-year-old St. Thomas man who had underlying health conditions died of coronavirus-related illness earlier this month. He died at home, and was not tested for exposure to the virus until after his death. Health officials were unaware of his condition, so he was not part of COVID-19 testing and tracking efforts.

Health authorities are turning greater attention to outreach and education for the territory's senior citizens and their caregivers or family members, urging them to adhere to social distancing practices and to contact the VIDOH if they display the symptoms of high fever, shortness of breath and coughing. "We are working alongside the VI National Guard and the VI Department of Human Services who have a log of all the seniors. We are working with them, going into the neighborhoods, ensuring that we project the message to them," Ms. Encarnacion said.

Mr. Bryan said the government has been identifying exactly where seniors live, based on GPS coordinates, so that first responders are better able to locate seniors during health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, or natural disasters.