

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Over 150 Suspected Cases Of Chikungunya In Virgin Islands, DOH Says

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The Virgin Islands Department of Health has revealed that since it began tracking chikungunya in the territory, over 150 suspected cases have been recorded.

That's according to Ester Ellis, DOH territorial epidemiologist, adding that DOH has "seen the number of cases in the territory go up."

A breakdown between the Islands reveals that St. Thomas has had the most cases by a wide margin with 130 suspected and 18 confirmed cases on the Island, followed by St. Croix with 25 suspected cases and St. John with 3. No case of chikungunya has been reported on Water Island.

The higher number of St. Thomas cases is due in part to the high number of tourists who visit the Island daily from cruise ships coming from other Caribbean Islands, Ellis said.

Ellis also revealed that the virus is transmitted through an infected person who is bitten by *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes. The infected mosquito then proceeds to bite another uninfected person, causing the disease to spread.

The Department of Health began tracking the disease in the territory four months ago.

Unlike dengue which has four distinct viral types and three chances that a person who was already infected may contract the disease again, chikungunya only has one, so once the disease is contracted by a person, they are immune for life.

Ellis said the fact that a person can only contract the disease once, explains the initial rapid spread and then a quick decline in infection rates. She added that an infected person usually starts to show symptoms three to seven days after the initial bite. The symptoms include high fever, joint pain, headache, muscle pain, pain in the hands and feet and rash.

Anyone who comes down with a sudden high fever and joint pain or swelling is cautioned to seek immediate medical care.