

The Virgin Islands Consortium

EVD68 Virus Sweeps Across U.S., V.I. Health Dept. Issues Alert

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The Virgin Islands Department of Health has issued an alert warning residents of a fast-spreading, extremely contagious virus--Enterovirus D68 (EVD68)--while revealing preventative measures that could quell the virus' rapid growth.

Although there have not been any cases reported in the Virgin Islands, reports coming out of the U.S. paints a rather grim picture -- as the virus mostly targets children, with those suffering from asthma being at greater risk of wheezing and having difficulty breathing. Symptoms include fever, coughing, runny nose, rash, mouth blisters, and body and muscle aches.

To date, the virus has been spotted in 40 states and four provinces in the U.S. and Canada, and the spread is projected to continue.

Health Commissioner Darice Plaskett stressed the importance of taking preventative measures to subdue the virus. These same preventative steps are being used throughout the U.S. and Canada. They are:

- Wash your hands frequently. Do so particularly before touching your baby, and teach your children the importance of hand-washing.
- Avoid exposure. Limit your infant's contact with people who have fevers or colds. This is especially important in premature babies and all infants in the first two months of life.
- Keep things clean. Make sure countertops are clean in the kitchen and bathrooms, especially when someone in your family has a cold. Discard used tissues right away.
- Don't share drinking glasses with others. Use your own glass or disposable cups when you or someone else is sick. Label each person's cup.
- Don't smoke. Infants who are exposed to tobacco smoke have a higher risk of contracting respiratory syncytical virus and potentially more-severe symptoms. If you do smoke, never do so inside the house or car. Wash toys regularly. Do this especially when your child or a playmate is sick.

Meanwhile, the territory [has been hit hard](#) with countless cases of chikungunya -- a mosquito-borne virus the Dept. of Health is still trying to contain, with over 400 suspected cases being reported on St. Thomas, a number that has grown substantially since the last count. St. Croix, although not as hard-hit as St. Thomas, has seen its share of chikungunya, and recently Sen. Diane Capehart, a St. Croix senator, came down [with the](#) illness.

Dr. Esther Ellis, health department epidemiologist, said the Department of Health has been in contact with the CDC and local health providers concerning EVD68, and will continue to keep a close eye on the virus.