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Dept. of Health to Residents: Be Careful, Coronavirus May Be Spreading in USVI Undetected

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V.I. Department of Health officials on Friday warned residents to take added precaution as they go about their daily lives in the age of the coronavirus. The call to be extremely vigilant came during a press conference held by the department, where it was revealed that the last two coronavirus cases were "community acquired", meaning "We do not know where the last two individuals got it from," said Dr. Esther Ellis, D.O.H.'s territorial epidemiologist. "This also means that there are probably more cases out in the community that are going undetected," she added.

Dr. Ellis said the undetected cases could be a result of individuals with no symptoms, or those with mild symptoms who are not calling the Dept. of Health hotline to get tested.

"This makes it even more critical at this time to follow all guidelines," Dr. Ellis said. "Wear your face coverings at all times. Stay home if you are sick. Stay home if you're an elderly or immune compromised."

D.O.H. urged residents to wear masks, as has been ordered by Governor Albert Bryan, when entering establishments. Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said the department has been receiving reports of no masks or individuals wearing masks without covering the nose or mouth. "The practice should stop as it could put you at risk and also make it dangerous for others," the commissioner said.

She later added, "I think it's safe to say that being at home is still your safest option and we're not in the clear yet."

Ms. Encarnacion said while D.O.H. believes its screening process at the territory's airports is effective, she indicated that people with coronavirus could still go undetected. Dept. of Health's Dr. Tai Camille Hunte-Cesar, explained that, "There is an incubation period associated with having the infection. Regardless of what type of measures we put in place at airports, negative screening at the airport process does not guarantee that persons entering the territory will in fact be negative for the remainder of their stay in the territory."

Dr. Hunte-Cesar added, "The incubation period is up to 14 days, so as we put in any strategy to be done at the airport, a negative screen does not mean that persons will not turn positive within the next 14 days of their stay."

D.O.H. encouraged individuals to monitor themselves for symptoms, and to self-report.

As of Thursday night, 2,535 tests were conducted territory-wide, of which 2,450 returned negative. The territory has seen 74 confirmed cases and 6 deaths, including a father, mother and son. According to D.O.H. 64 individuals have recovered. D.O.H. is currently tracking four individuals, with the last two cases [being reported on St. John](#). The health department is currently tracking four active cases.

The uptick in confirmed coronavirus cases comes as the territory recently opened its doors to leisure travelers and hotels started accepting reservations. The decision by Governor Bryan to allow visitors back into the territory came with a lot of risk, and Mr. Bryan has said he would walk back the decision if cases surged as a result of the reopening. The USVI is now in its ["Open Doors" phase](#) of the pandemic.

The territory's main travel hub is Florida, with no less than six routes to the U.S. Virgin Islands daily via a number of carriers, according to a Dept. of Tourism official. This is significant because Florida in recent times has been one of the states with the most Covid-19 cases. The number of new coronavirus cases in the state skyrocketed by 3,200 on Wednesday, shattering the previous one-day record. The sharp climb came as experts at Johns Hopkins University say Florida has "all the markings of the next large epicenter of coronavirus transmission."

The state's one-day case record has been broken several times in the past couple of weeks, according to local reports in Florida. The statewide cumulative total was over 86,000 cases and more than 3,104 deaths as of Friday.

The worldwide case total, including deaths, is grim: 8.6 million confirmed cases, and 460,366 deaths as of Saturday morning, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

