

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Public Health Alert: Possible Outbreak Of Highly Contagious Eye Disease Detected In St. Thomas

Health / **Published On October 14, 2016 09:50 PM /**

Staff **October 14, 2016**



ST. THOMAS -- A possible outbreak of the epidemic Keratoconjunctivitis (EKC) has been identified in the St. Thomas district, the Department of Health made known late Friday. D.O.H. said it was notified by a St. Thomas ophthalmology practice that so far 30 patients have been diagnosed with a probable case of EKC.

D.O.H. says it's awaiting lab results to confirm the diagnosis of these patients.

EKC is an acute eye infection that can cause corneal scarring. It is a highly contagious viral infection of the eye, and symptoms can last two weeks or more. The symptoms of EKC can occur in one or both eyes, and may include the following:

• A feeling that something is in the eye • Redness, irritation and itchiness of the eyes ("pink eye") • Swelling of the eyelids • Sensitivity to light • Clear or yellow drainage that may make the eyelids stick together • Blurred vision • Eye pain

According to D.O.H., EKC is very contagious and children who have the disease should not attend school until symptoms are gone or until cleared by a doctor. It is okay to go to work, D.O.H. says, however healthcare workers should be clear of the infection by a healthcare provider prior to returning to work.

If you think you have the disease, D.O.H. says you should do the following:

- Avoid touching your eyes whenever possible. If you do touch your eyes, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water
- Avoid touching other people unless your hands are freshly washed
- Avoid hugging or kissing with close face to face contact during an EKC outbreak
- Dispose of or carefully wash items (hot water and detergent) that touch your eyes
- Do not share eye makeup or other items used on the eyes (e.g., towels, tissues, eye drops, eye medications)
- Use a separate towel and face cloth for each member of the household
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Use disposable tissues to blow your nose, sneeze or cough

D.O.H added that if you visit a clinic with eye symptoms, tell the eye doctor of your possible condition, to help diminish the virus's spread.

To report suspected cases, contact Dr. Esther Ellis, 340-718-1311 ext 3841.