

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. Of Health To Launch Diabetes Prevention Program On April 5

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ST. CROIX -- On April 5, the Department of Health (D.O.H.) will commence a program aimed at preventing the spread of diabetes type 2 on St. Croix, D.O.H. announced this week.

Guided by a trained lifestyle coach, groups of participants will learn the skills they need to make lasting changes such as losing a modest amount of weight, being more physically active, and managing stress, the department said.

People with prediabetes — higher-than-normal blood glucose (sugar) levels — are 5 to 15 times more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than those with normal blood glucose

levels, according to D.O.H. In fact, many people with prediabetes will develop type 2 diabetes within 3 years if they do not take steps to prevent it.

“One in three American adults has prediabetes, so the need for prevention has never been greater,” said Chronic Disease Director, Kathleen Arnold-Lewis. “The National Diabetes Prevention Program offers a proven approach to preventing or delaying the onset of type 2 diabetes through modest lifestyle changes made with the support of a coach and one’s peers.”

As part of the pilot program on St. Croix, participants will learn how to eat healthy, add physical activity to their routine, manage stress, stay motivated, and solve problems that can get in the way of healthy changes, D.O.H. said. The National Diabetes Prevention Program group will meet for a year—once a week for the first six months, then once a month for the second 6 months to maintain healthy lifestyle changes. The program’s group setting provides a supportive environment with people who are facing similar challenges and trying to make the same changes. Together participants celebrate their successes and find ways to overcome obstacles.

The D.O.H. program is part of the National Diabetes Prevention Program, led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It will begin on April 5 on St. Croix and November of this year in St. Thomas. Depending on the results of the St. Croix program, the department will determine whether to move forward with a similar effort in the St. Thomas-St. John District later this year, according to Nykole Tyson, D.O.H. director of public relations.

The local program will meet at the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix Campus, on Thursdays from 5:45 – 6:45 p.m. There is no cost to attend classes. D.O.H. said it’s currently working to enroll participants in the first round of classes.

The National Diabetes Prevention Program is based on research which showed people with prediabetes who lost 5 to 7 percent of their body weight (10 to 14 pounds for a 200-pound person) by making modest changes reduced their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58 percent.

Nationwide implementation of the program could save the U.S. health care system \$5.7 billion and prevent about 885,000 future cases of type 2 diabetes, a serious condition that can lead to health problems including heart attack; stroke; blindness; kidney failure; or loss of toes, feet, or legs. Projected savings for the territory was not included in the D.O.H. release.

“Making small changes can lead to big differences,” Mrs. Arnold-Lewis said. “Working with a trained lifestyle coach who provides guidance, enables program participants to make lasting changes together.”

People are more likely to have prediabetes and type 2 diabetes if they:

- Are 45 years of age or older;
- Are overweight;
- Have a family history of type 2 diabetes;
- Are physically active fewer than three times per week; or

- Have been diagnosed with gestational diabetes during pregnancy or gave birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds.

To participate in the National Diabetes Prevention Program, individuals must:

- be 18 years or older,
- be overweight (BMI $\geq$ 24),
- have a diagnosis of prediabetes or previously diagnosed with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) while pregnant.

For more information and/or to enroll call Lyna Frederiks (340)774-7477 Ext. 5675; & (340) 277-7609, or email lyna.fredericks@doh.vi.gov.

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