

The Virgin Islands Consortium

As Measles Spread Across U.S., Dept. of Health Raises Awareness In USVI

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Department of Health Commissioner Designee Justa Encarnacion is leading a measles vaccination campaign amid the global outbreak, D.O.H. said Tuesday. The department said there have not been any confirmed cases of measles in the U.S. Virgin Islands, however, to protect the community against the highly contagious virus, D.O.H. is urging residents to know their vaccination status and become immunized as needed.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as of last week, there have been 704 confirmed measles cases across 22 states -- the highest number in 25 years. Of those affected, the majority were unvaccinated adults and children. "School-age children who are exempt from vaccinations for religious or other reasons, are particularly

at risk and should be extremely cautious during a time like this,” Ms. Encarnacion said.

Data from the 2015 National Immunization Survey indicates that the Virgin Islands’ immunization rates for the MMR vaccine, used to prevent measles, mumps and rubella, are slightly lower than the national average for children between ages 19 to 35 months. While the national average was 91.9 percent, in the V.I. it was 77.2 percent, according to the data.

Virgin Islands Code Title 17, Chapter 10, Subchapter 116-1, states, “all children registering for kindergarten and for any public, parochial or private schools must have a valid certification of immunization for such diseases as Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Measles, Poliomyelitis, and all other diseases as are required by the standard listing issued by the Commissioner of Health.”

“Parents and guardians can help to protect their children by vaccinating them against diseases like measles, which is highly contagious, but preventable,” Ms. Encarnacion added.

Key facts from the World Health Organization:

- Measles vaccination resulted in an 80% drop in measles deaths between 2000 and 2017 worldwide.
- In 2017, about 85% of the world's children received one dose of measles vaccine by their first birthday through routine health services – up from 72% in 2000.
- During 2000-2017, measles vaccination prevented an estimated 21.1 million deaths making measles vaccine one of the best buys in public health.

D.O.H.'s Epidemiology Division has a vaccine preventable disease epidemiologist and keeps track of suspect measles cases, D.O.H. said. “We had suspect measles cases this year that have all been ruled out. In the event of a positive case, we would conduct a case investigation and track close contacts to monitor for potential additional cases. We recommend everyone get vaccinated to protect themselves from measles,” said Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis.

Measles typically begins with high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. It is important to speak to a healthcare professional if you suspect you may have been exposed to the disease.

For children and adults seeking the MMR vaccine or other vaccines, visit the Department of Health’s Maternal Child Health Clinic and Community Health Clinic respectively. For more information on immunization, visit doh.vi.gov.

For information on vaccines for children:

Maternal and Child Health St. Thomas/St. John (340) 774-8804 extension 2600 Maternal and Child Health St. Croix (340) 718-1311 extension 3875 or (340) 777-8804

For adults: Community Health St. Thomas/St. John (340) 774-7477 extension 5620 Community Health St. Croix (340) 718-1311 extension 3760

