

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Among First in Nation to Deploy Latest CDC-Supported Disease Surveillance System, First to Use Amazon Web Services Cloud

The Health Department says its new NBS 7 surveillance system speeds disease reporting from hospitals, labs and providers while giving epidemiologists stronger tools to detect outbreaks, track trends and respond faster to emerging public health threats.

Health / **Published On September 17, 2026 06:53 AM /**

Staff Consortium **September 17, 2026**



Members of the Epidemiology Division team at Alfredo Andrews School during the 2024 lead event.

The V.I. Department of Health has modernized the territory's disease surveillance system with the rollout of the latest version of the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System Base System, becoming one of the first jurisdictions in the country to deploy NBS 7 and the first to implement it using Amazon Web Services cloud technology.

The upgraded platform gives the Department of Health's Epidemiology Division faster tools for receiving and processing disease reports from hospitals, laboratories and healthcare providers, allowing epidemiologists to identify potential outbreaks, monitor disease trends and support public health action more quickly.

"Strong public health begins with strong data," Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said. "This investment gives our epidemiologists better tools to identify health threats, track disease trends and respond more quickly when our communities are at risk. It also reflects the level of expertise and innovation within our Epidemiology Division. I am truly proud that the work being done here in the Virgin Islands is receiving national recognition."

The modernization effort was recently highlighted in the peer-reviewed journal JMIR Medical Informatics, which documented the territory's implementation of NBS 7 and its use of cloud technology to strengthen public health surveillance.

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, who leads the Epidemiology Division and served as senior author on the publication, said the system improves the speed and reliability of disease reporting, strengthens communication with healthcare providers and laboratories, gives the territory greater control over its public health data and supports faster decision-making during outbreaks and other emergencies.

"This modernization effort represents years of collaboration and innovation," Dr. Ellis said. "It strengthens our ability to monitor diseases, identify emerging health threats and provide public health leaders with the information they need to make timely, evidence-based decisions that protect our communities."

The surveillance upgrade is among several recent accomplishments by the Epidemiology Division that have received national recognition through peer-reviewed scientific publications. Department scientists and epidemiologists have recently contributed to research involving disease surveillance, outbreak investigations, environmental health, substance-use monitoring and wildlife health.

Among those publications was an investigation into Legionnaires' disease outbreaks associated with two U.S. Virgin Islands hotels. The work, published in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, was intended to strengthen environmental health response and disease-prevention efforts.

Division researchers have also contributed to a wastewater surveillance study examining cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine, amphetamine, xylazine and nicotine across the territory. The Department said the findings can help public health officials better understand substance-use trends and inform planning and response efforts.

Another collaborative study examined bat populations in the Virgin Islands and found no evidence of rabies virus exposure, adding to scientific knowledge about wildlife and public health in the Caribbean.

Commissioner Encarnacion said the growing body of research reflects a broader effort to turn scientific findings into practical improvements in public health. “We often measure success by the services we provide to the community, but success is also about the knowledge we gain and how we use it,” she said. “Every study we conduct, every new approach we develop and every improvement we make to our public health system helps us better understand the challenges we face and strengthens our ability to protect the people of the Virgin Islands.”

The Department said the publications collectively demonstrate its effort to use research, technology and data to improve public health locally while contributing to the broader scientific community.

VIDOH plans to continue investing in public health informatics, disease surveillance, emergency preparedness, research and data modernization. Officials said those efforts are intended to strengthen public health programs, improve evidence-based decision-making and enhance the territory’s ability to respond to emerging health threats.