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37 New Covid-19 Cases Reported For All of Last Week, But Drop In Testing Affects Knowledge of Virus's True Impact

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The V.I. Department of Health recorded 37 new cases of the coronavirus in the U.S. Virgin Islands last week up until Friday's data, a drastic drop in reported cases. However, the latest numbers provided by D.O.H. do not show the virus's true impact on the territory, as the department has tested way less individuals than it has in the past. Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said recently the department has changed its strategy so that it could test more individuals, and that more tests would be performed this week.

"We're going out in the public and we're targeting specific populations... We're changing our strategy so that we can actually increase our numbers. And we're also having some of our local labs increase [testing] as well. So hopefully we'll see an increase of testing within the next week or

so," said Ms. Encarnacion during the last Covid-19 update, held Monday, when asked why the number of tests had dropped. She also stated that testing had dropped because the department was receiving less calls for testing.

An example of the drop in tests is results for [Sept. 13.](#), where D.O.H. reported only one positive case. However, the department only tested 8 individuals on Sept. 13. The previous Sunday, Sept. 6, D.O.H. data show 95 individuals were tested, with 9 testing positive.

In fact, as testing ramped up on Friday, for example, with 257 tests, the number of cases climbed to 15 — D.O.H.'s highest report of cases for the week.

The importance of testing has been stressed by a wide spectrum of medical professionals. A recent study by Emory University researchers, in collaboration with Fulton County Board of Health (FCBOH), found that testing for COVID-19 in long-term care facilities (LTCFs) before cases were known to occur resulted in lower overall COVID-19 cases. The results of the study were recently published in [CDC's MMWR Early Release report.](#)

According to the study, the team conducted one-day mass testing events in 28 Fulton County LTCFs and four weeks of symptom-based follow-up screening. A total of 5,671 residents and staff were tested. In facilities where preemptive testing and follow-up screening was conducted, 1.5 percent of residents and 1.7 percent of staff members tested positive, compared to 42.4 percent of residents and 11.8 percent of staff testing positive in facilities where testing was done after a COVID-19 case was known to occur.

Over the weekend, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reversed course](#) and reverted back to a guidance that calls for anyone who has been in close contact with an infected individual to be tested. CDC had dropped this guidance and adopted controversial policy that said people didn't need to get tested if they didn't feel sick, a move that elicited a barrage of criticism from health experts, who couldn't understand why the U.S.'s top health agency would offer such guidance during a pandemic that has now taken [more than 200,000 American lives.](#)

It remains to be seen how D.O.H., which has been closely following CDC's guidelines, will react to the latest change in the CDC's testing guidance, including whether a more aggressive testing approach will be enabled.

Relative to cases, D.O.H. reported in St. Thomas 19 of the 37 cases last week, representing more than half of the department's tally. St. Croix followed closely with 17 cases, according to D.O.H. data. The department only reported one case in St. John all of last week.

The department was tracking 58 active cases as of Friday, and reported 1,180 individuals as recovered. Of the total actives, St. Thomas had 41 as of Friday, followed by St. Croix with 15, and St. John 2.

Nineteen individuals have [died from the virus](#) in the territory: 12 on St. Thomas, 6 on St. Croix and 1 on St. John.