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No Covid Variant Detected in USVI as St. Thomas Surge Increases Positivity Rate to 3.8 Percent; More Stimulus Checks Coming This Week

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The V.I. Dept. of Health as of Tuesday had not detected any Covid-19 variant in the U.S. Virgin Islands, confirmed Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. D.O.H. hasn't been saying much about the possibility of a variant affecting the St. Thomas-St. John District, but talk had started circulating in the community as to whether the recent surge could be the result of a mutation.

"We have consistently sent positive samples for sequencing and have not received a positive variant," Ms. Encarnacion told the Consortium Tuesday.

According to the territory's top infectious disease official, Dr. Esther Ellis, there were 127 active cases in the territory as of Tuesday: 107 on St. Thomas, 11 on St. Croix and 9 on St. John. The

territory's positivity rate was at 3.8 percent, she revealed, speaking during the Bryan's administration's weekly Covid-19 press briefing Tuesday.

Dr. Ellis said most cases were among individuals who are unvaccinated, students, food service workers, government workers, and health and social assistance workers.

There were four Covid-19 hospitalizations in St. Thomas as of Tuesday, with no patients on ventilators, while Croix had no hospitalizations related to the virus.

Part of the increase in cases is tied to events, Dr. Ellis said. "We have seen new positivity cases related to parties and other gatherings," she said, adding that [approval is required to hold special events](#).

"Event organizers and promoters wanting to host an event outside of the executive orders need approval from the Department of Health, Division of Environmental Health," she said.

Dr. Ellis warned, "The Covid-19 Task Force has the right to conduct compliance inspections. If found to be out of compliance a cease and desist order will be issued for the event."

She stressed, "We want to keep people out of our hospitals and we want our Covid-19 numbers down to zero. The only way to do that is if everyone follows the Covid-19 guidelines and if we use our best tool to fight this Covid-19 pandemic, the Covid-19 vaccine. This recent surge in positive cases is preventable."

Dr. Ellis said 40,649 individuals have obtained at least one dose of a vaccine, which means that 51.3 percent of the population has at least one dose, while 32,522 individuals are fully vaccinated or 41 percent.

Richard Motta, Government House director of communications said following Dr. Ellis's remarks, "I think it's important for us to let the public know at this current juncture that all of the recent cases that we are seeing in the territory are amongst individuals who are unvaccinated."

He also explained that a Covid-19 outbreak at the Bureau of Internal Revenue led to a slight delay in the mailing of stimulus checks that were expected to be sent out by the end of May. He said 9,000 checks will be mailed out on Thursday of this week.

"So go check your mailbox if you haven't received your stimulus check as yet," he said.