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Dept. of Health Shifts Covid Testing Strategy to Drive-Through and Prioritizes Symptomatic Patients as Demand For Testing Surges

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The line for a Covid-19 testing site at Home Depot in St. Thomas on July 27, 2021. By. KYLE MURPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The V.I. Dept. of Health on Thursday said it shifted to temporarily cease its Tuesday and Thursday Covid-19 pop-up testing events on St. Croix and St. Thomas as the department sets out to improve its free testing options by expanding daily drive-through testing while prioritizing symptomatic patients and close contact of a confirmed positive case.

The change will not impact pop-up testing and vaccination that occur on Wednesdays on St. John, D.O.H. said.

Testing will be conducted drive-thru style at the Charles Harwood Complex from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. and at the Schneider Regional Medical Center from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. by appointment only, according to D.O.H.

Covid-19 Mitigation Team Lead Dr. Debra Wright-Francis shared her thoughts on the recent changes. "D.O.H. remains committed to making testing available to the community. The surge in the number of people testing positive for Covid-19 has dictated a pivot to addressing the symptomatic patients and contacts first."

The department said it is also working with private providers to expand testing options. Due to the current surge and high testing demand, D.O.H. is urging the community to schedule their testing online, utilize the epidemiology hotline, or contact private providers directly "so that we can better accommodate everyone in need of testing at this time."

As of Thursday, positive cases [had dropped to 279 territory-wide](#), 187 on St. Thomas, 86 on St. Croix and 6 on St. John.

Pop-up vaccinations will continue throughout the community at previously used pop-up testing sites. The current schedule for pop-up vaccinations is Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Charles Harwood Complex on St. Croix and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. at Cost-U-Less on St. Thomas.

Community Vaccination Centers remain open on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Anyone 12 and older can get the COVID-19 vaccine by walking into any of our Community Vaccination Centers in both districts, according to the release.

On St. Croix, the Community Vaccination Center is located at the Nissan Center which is in La Grande Princesse, adjacent to the Honda Dealership and The Paint Shop, on the same side of the street as Food Town.

On St. Thomas, the Community Vaccination Center is located at the Community Health Clinic on the 2nd floor at the Schneider Regional Medical Center.

You can schedule an appointment for the Covid-19 vaccine by calling (340) 777-8227 or by scheduling yourself online at covid19usvi.com/vaccines.

The epidemiology hotline numbers are accessible from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. for callers to report suspected cases at (340) 712-6299 OR (340) 776-1519. Preregistration for testing can be completed online at covid19usvi.com/testing.

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis urged the public to follow best practices during the current Covid-19 surge. "It is critical during this surge that if you are sick you stay home, only leaving your home to get tested. After receiving a test you are required to quarantine. Additionally, if you are a close contact of a positive you are required to quarantine for a minimum of 7 days. You can test out of quarantine no sooner than day 7 if you have no symptoms at all," he said.

Close contacts are individuals who were within 6 feet of a positive case for 15 minutes without a mask on over their nose and mouth. Close contacts exposed to a positive case should stay away from others and wait at least 4 days before getting a Covid-19 test.

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