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Highly Contagious Delta Variant of Covid-19 is Now Dominant Strain in U.S. Virgin Islands, Dept. of Health Confirms

Coronavirus / **Published On September 03, 2021 10:27 AM /**

Staff Consortium **September 03, 2021**

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The V.I. Dept. of Health on Friday confirmed that the highly contagious Delta variant of Covid-19 is now the predominant strain in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

D.O.H.'s Division of Epidemiology has been working with Yale University to test samples from positive Covid-19 cases. Last week, 12 Covid-19 samples were sequenced and 11 (91.7%) of those were confirmed to be the Delta variant. One sample (8.3%) was confirmed to be the Alpha variant (B.1.1.7), the department said.

D.O.H. said new cases continue to rise amongst unvaccinated individuals. As of September 2nd, there were 181 active cases in the territory and the positivity rate is 3.27 percent.

"With this surge in positive cases there is a greater chance for the virus to continue to mutate," D.O.H. said. The department has reported 57 deaths related to Covid-19 and 24 of those occurred after the Delta variant was confirmed to be present in the territory in late July 2021. "With the emergence of this lethal variant we have also seen record-high hospitalizations," D.O.H. said.

Health officials said mutations can make the virus more virulent and could potentially cause it to be resistant to the vaccine in the future. The sooner more residents get vaccinated, the risk of the virus mutating will decrease.

Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis said, "The Covid-19 vaccine is effective at preventing hospitalizations and death, and if you have not gotten vaccinated I urge you to get the vaccine to protect not only yourself, but your loved ones, and the community as a whole."

"Hospitalizations and deaths related to Covid-19 are preventable because the vaccines are protective against all known variants and are readily accessible across the territory," D.O.H. said. "The hesitancy or unwillingness to get vaccinated also harms our efforts to achieve community immunity. The sooner we get to 70 percent of our community being fully vaccinated, the sooner we can end this public health crisis in the territory."

D.O.H. said anyone 12 and older can get the Covid-19 vaccine by walking into a Community Vaccination Center by calling (340) 777-8227 or by scheduling yourself online at covid19usvi.com/vaccines.

St. Croix's Community Vaccination Center is located at the Nissan Center on St. Croix 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.

The department's epidemiology hotline remains open 7 days a week from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. for callers to report suspected cases of Covid-19 and to schedule testing for individuals who are sick or have been exposed to a confirmed case of Covid-19. The hotline phone numbers are (340) 712-6299 OR (340) 776-1519. You can also schedule testing online at covid19usvi.com/testing.

In observance of Labor Day, the Epidemiology hotline and drive-thru testing will be closed on Monday, September 6.