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Local Health Authorities Say Covid-19 Will Become Endemic in 2022; Annual Vaccination Needed in Coming Years to Achieve Herd Immunity

Coronavirus / **Published On October 09, 2021 04:40 AM /**

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As the virulent Delta variant of Covid-19 continues to ebb, the pandemic that shook the world in March 2020 will eventually become an endemic as vaccines become more accessible, though annual vaccination will be needed for the next few years to achieve herd immunity.

That's according to U.S. Virgin Islands top health authorities, including Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, and V.I. Dept. of Health Infectious Disease Specialist Dr. Tai Hunte-Ceasar. Both provided comments to the Consortium on where they believe the territory will be in 2022 regarding Covid-19.

For Dr. Ellis, the pandemic will have crested, though not eradicated. She sees a virus that will have diminished to endemic status — where the virus continues to exist at a baseline level with pockets of breakouts that can be controlled.

"I think that the coronavirus will become endemic — meaning that it will continue to circulate in pockets of the global population for years to come," Dr. Ellis said. "But failure to eradicate the virus does not mean that death, illness or social isolation will continue. The future will depend heavily on the type of immunity people acquire (infection or vaccination) and how the virus evolves."

She said there will be a decrease in mortality "due to vaccines and new meds coming. Also, with the availability of a vaccine for 5-11 year olds, I do believe we can reach a higher herd immunity—leading to better protection against severe disease for all."

Pfizer has asked the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to approve its vaccine for children 5-11, a move that would lead to millions of youngsters becoming eligible for inoculation. The approval could come in a few weeks.

Relative to Dr. Ellis's comment on new medicines coming available, Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics [announced recently](#) that their experimental Covid-19 pill significantly helped high-risk people in the early stage of infection from becoming seriously ill or dying, a major step in the battle against the pandemic. The pill is on track to become the first at-home, easy-to-use treatment for the coronavirus.

Like Dr. Ellis, Dr. Hunte-Cesar sees pockets of infection still affecting the USVI and world in 2022, but those incidents will be controlled. She said annual Covid-19 vaccination will be needed for the next few years for herd immunity.

"Where I think we will be in 1 year: we should have wide availability of vaccines from 6 months and up by then and more access to vaccines around the world," Dr. Hunte-Cesar said. "We will likely still have small epidemics of COVID with more variant development but probably not like the surge that the Delta variant has given us. This is only dependent on the acceptance of the vaccine that will likely have to be taken on a yearly basis for at least a few years to achieve community immunity. With historically lower vaccination rates into the territory compared to the mainland and tourism travel year-round, we will likely see low levels of ongoing transmission even when global rates appear to be controlled."

Governor Albert Bryan has stated his intention to loosen Covid-19 restrictions as cases continue to decrease. The governor told the Consortium the administration is waiting for St. Croix cases to drop below 100 and lower before the action is taken. And he's detailed to the publication what that means [here](#).

As of Friday there were 154 active cases territory-wide: 129 on St. Croix, 23 on St. Thomas, and 2 on St. John.