

Image not found or type unknown

## 10 Percent of Student Population at V.I. Public Schools Will Undergo Monthly PCR Covid-19 Testing

Education / **Published On November 09, 2021 06:06 AM /**

Linda Straker **November 09, 2021**

Image not found or type unknown



*Last updated at 11:24 a.m. on Tues. Nov. 9, 2021.*

The Department of Education as part of its surveillance among student population will require parents to sign a one-time parental consent form for monthly random Covid-19 testing that will begin in December.

“As of December 2021, 10 percent of the student population will be randomly tested for Covid-19 as part of a surveillance test,” Victor Somme III, assistant D.O.E. commissioner said in a news conference on Monday.

Speaking about testing and vaccination for students as the Virgin Islands [prepares for the reopening of in-person public schools](#) in January 2022, Mr. Somme said his office has been working steadfastly with school nurses since April 2021 on student testing for Covid-19.

Students, he said will have to undergo both Antigen testing and PCR through the school system and those who wish not to use the school's service will have to present a negative PCR from an approved medical facility. The PCR testing is for general surveillance and supports D.O.E. in providing the Dept. of Health with Covid-19 data to monitor possible exposure on campuses, according to Cynthia Graham, D.O.E. director of communications.

The Dept. of Education must seek consent from parents before performing the test, according to Ms. Graham. "If a student presents with Covid symptoms at school, if the parent has given consent, we will provide the student an antigen test on campus. If there is no consent from the parent, the child will be sent home and be required to test and produce negative test results before returning to school," she said.

The department has successfully partnered with the Department of Health and Infinity Empowering — a U.S. Dept of Health contractor to train school nurses for testing students, according to Mr. Somme. The Antigen test result will be known in 15 minutes and will not require laboratory analysis as the PCR.

"It will only be used on students who are displaying Covid-19 symptoms," said Mr. Somme, who highlighted some of the symptoms. "Students with Covid-19 symptoms are quarantined in isolation at their school until the school nurse can test the student if parental consent had been previously granted," he said.

These symptoms include but are not limited to fever or chills, coughing, nasal congestion or running nose, loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, diarrhea or vomiting, stomachache, tiredness, headache, muscle or body ache, and poor appetite.

The other type of testing performed by school nurses is PCR. The training and test supplies for PCR testing are provided at no cost to the Department of Education and the Government of the Virgin Islands by Affinity Empowering.

"PCR testing is used only to survey the student population and required for school opening by the Dept of Health. It is strongly recommended by the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]," said the assistant commissioner, who explained that PCR testing was piloted at one school in St. Thomas and one on St. Croix.

"Completed test results are mailed to Infinity Empowering or through text or online...Conducting surveillance testing allows the Department of Education and Department of Health additional contact tracing and the ability to try and track trends in schools and communities," he said.

Mr. Somme further disclosed that the vaccination rate in the St Thomas/St John district for Dept. of Education employees now stands 49.81 percent. In the St. Croix district, it is 46.86 percent. The territory-wide total for D.O.E. employees stood at 48.31 percent as of Monday.

"This analysis represents an increase in employee vaccination of 6.2% in September 2021," said Mr. Somme, who announced that a vaccination campaign in June involving various partners contributed to the notable increase.

D.O.E. will soon be launching a new vaccination campaign and the focus will be on students 12 to 18. Despite the increase in vaccination among Education employees, protocols like face masks is

now part of school uniform and must be worn at school, school events and on school buses.

© Viconsortium 2024