

The Virgin Islands Consortium

D.O.H. Expanding Testing Capacity With Pop-Up Sites as Omicron Spreads; Health Commissioner Explains When People Should Get Tested

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Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion announced Friday new pop-up testing capacity in the USVI as active Covid-19 cases continue to surge, setting a new record every day for the past several days. The commissioner also explained when a Covid-19 test should be taken in an effort to ease the pressure on testing facilities caused by the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

The Health Department received the results of the official Covid-19 sequencing samples sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Ms. Encarnacion said that of the

specimens sent, 90 percent tested positive for Omicron and 10 percent were positive for Delta.

"The validation of Omicron also allows us to continue to order the needed antivirals to support you. In response to the recent surge we are modifying our response strategy to enhance testing and surveillance capacity," she said. The department, Ms. Encarnacion explained was in the process of shifting resources and staffing toward these activities in temporarily reducing its contact tracing to include only hospitalized cases and typical circumstances.

"This new strategy will enable us to focus efforts on key priority areas given the widespread community transmission of Covid-19 being experienced throughout the territory," she said while announcing that several locations where testing is already conducted will become pop-up sites for testing to meet the increasing demand.

The pop-up sites are open Mon.-Fri. from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. On St. Croix, it is located at the Charles Harwood Complex in Richmond, on St. Thomas at the Schneider Regional Medical Center. On St. John testing will take place Wednesdays and Fridays from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the V.I. Port Authority Gravel Parking Lot. "If we can expand anymore we will," the health commissioner said.

When to Take a Covid-19 Test

Ms. Encarnacion said people should take a Covid-19 test within three to five days after exposure because the virus needs some time to multiply in the body, and failure to wait at least 72 hours could lead to an infected person getting an erroneous result.

"We realize that once you have been told that you were exposed the immediate reaction is to get tested because of the anxiety levels going up," she said while advising about the correct steps that need to be followed once a person is exposed to the virus.

"The one to two days prior to developing symptoms the viral load is highest and you are most contagious, the inflammatory response takes over. Once you begin to develop symptoms your body is fighting and decreasing the viral load, shortly after that time you become less contagious but the possibility of transmitting the virus still exist," she said during a news conference on Friday.

"We that said, I ask that if you were in close contact of a positive person that you quarantine and then get tested three to five days following your exposure. As indicated earlier, at that time your viral load will be at the point where we can best determine if you are infected with the Covid virus," said the Health commissioner.

"So, standing in long lines the day after you think you have been exposed does not necessarily mean you are going to get a positive result. It is going to give you false affirmation that you are not positive and then you go out and continue to infect others because your viral load then continues to increase," she explained.

Individuals who receive a positive Covid-19 result should continue to follow the guidelines. "You should not go to work if you are sick or if you have been identified as a close contact of someone diagnosed with Covid-19; you should remain in quarantine until you receive a negative test result. If you test positive for Covid-19 and are having

symptoms you should isolate,” said Ms. Encarnacion.

Advising further, she said, “If you are exposed to someone and you are fully vaccinated you may return to work after quarantining for five days and get tested if symptoms develop. If symptoms do not develop you should return to work and continue to wear a mask over your nose and mouth.”

“If you become ill at work and have symptoms suggestive of Covid-19 you are to leave work and call the epidemiology hotline to schedule an appointment. You must quarantine while awaiting results. Even if the test results are negative for Covid-19 you should remain quarantined until all symptoms are resolved,” said the Health commissioner.

“If you test positive and do not have any symptoms you should quarantine for five days. If you remain without symptoms you can return to the public after five days, but you must continue to wear your mask over your nose and mouth,” she said while calling on the public to play its role by following and applying the protocols or guidelines to protect themselves and others from becoming infected.

Correction: Jan. 3, 2022 at 6:52 a.m.

A previous version of this story included pop-up testing time and days in St. John as selfsame with St. Thomas and St. Croix, meaning Mon.-Fri. from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Yet while this is true for the two big islands, St. John pop-up site testing will take place Wednesdays and Fridays from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the V.I. Port Authority Gravel Parking Lot, according to Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. We've updated the story to reflect the correct information.