

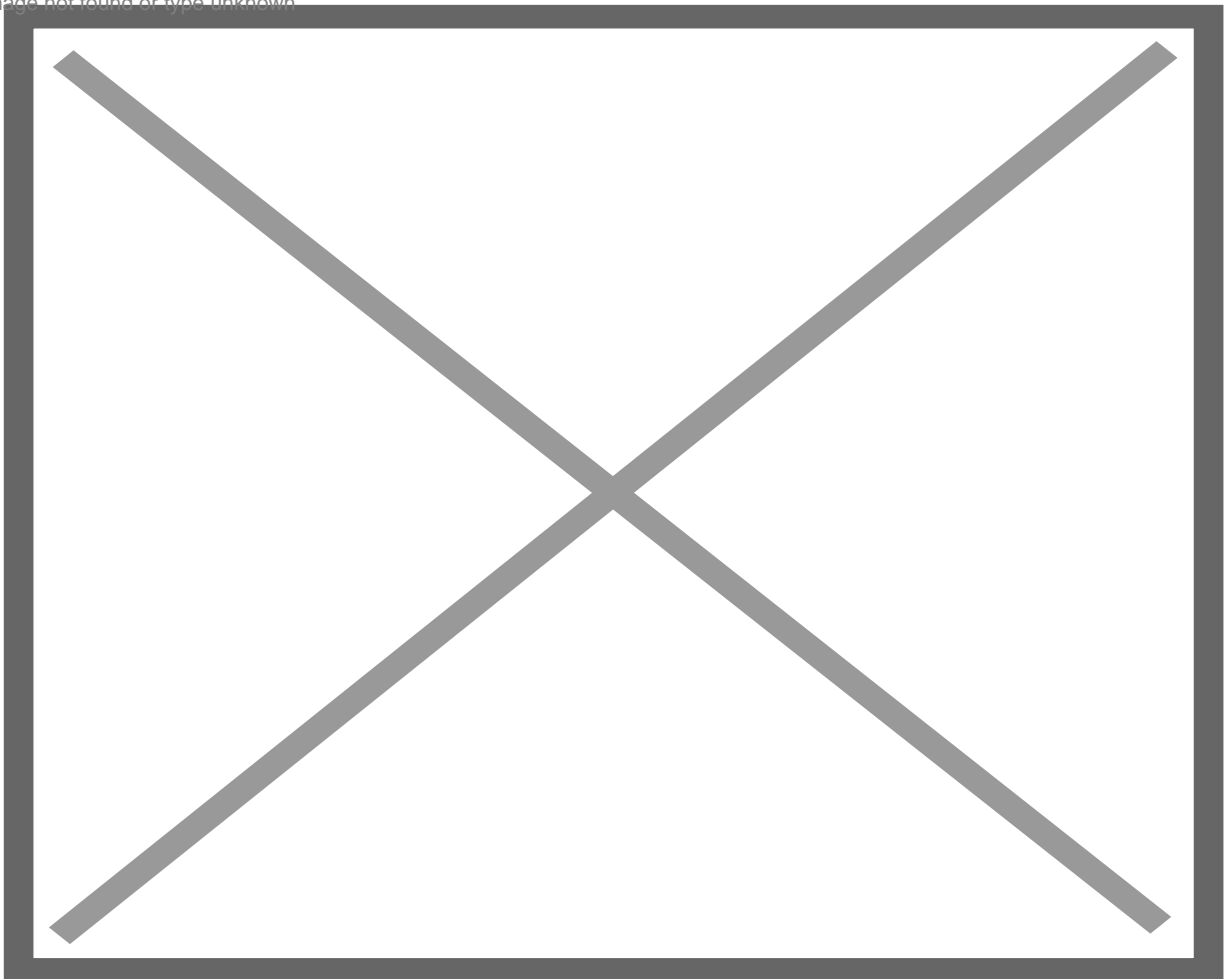
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Active Cases Climb to 2,493; Infant Hospitalized at SRMC for Over a Week; D.O.H. Encouraging Parents to Vaccinate Children 5 and Up; Businesses Warned Against Forcing Sick Employees to Work

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Linda Straker **January 05, 2022**

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As Covid-19 active cases continue to surge in this wave of infection, V.I. health officials are reporting that there is a significant number of children under five who are becoming infected with the virus and are requiring hospitalization.

“We are seeing higher rates of Covid-19 among pediatric ages including newborn, infant and toddlers less than 5 years of age. This is the population that is unable to be vaccinated and are being exposed by their parents most likely,” said Dr. Tai Hunte-Caeser, medical director at the V.I. Department of Health.

Vaccination is recommended for people aged five and up.

“The best protection for these babies is vaccination among parents and family members. This is a request coming directly from the pediatricians in our clinic...The nation is seeing record levels of hospitalization in the pediatric population and so are we,” she said during a news conference hosted by Governor Albert Bryan on Tuesday.

D.O.H. reported 2,493 active Covid-19 infections Tuesday night, up 382 active infections from Monday, as the Omicron variant continues its rapid spread in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

According to [data](#) provided by the health department, St. Thomas accounted for 1,205 of those cases, followed by St. Croix with 1,180, and St. John with 97. Cases on the three islands totaled 2,482, and it was not clear where the remaining 11 cases were confirmed. The latest numbers also represent a new record for each of the islands, driven by the Omicron variant, which has all but pushed out the deadlier Delta strain.

Dr. Hunte-Caeser said Tuesday that an infant has been hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center (SRMC) for more than one week. “We are praying for this baby's recovery,” she said while urging the community to do the right things recommended by the Department of Health to reduce and prevent the spread of Covid-19.

“I am encouraging the community to use best judgment right now — limit your exposure, wear your mask properly and gently remind others to do the same. Do not run out for testing unless you develop symptoms,” she said.

The medical director explained that people should call for medical advice rather than flooding emergency rooms. However, an in-person visit should not be done “unless you truly need emergency attention.”

“If you are positive stay home, even if a contact tracer does not call you...clean your environment and wash your hands. Your doctor may prescribe an anti-viral if you contact them. We are relying on you to do the right thing to limit the spread,” she begged.

She used the opportunity to remind the management of businesses that all staff who have tested positive should remain as recommended in the health protocol.

“Businesses are required to follow the quarantine recommendations by the Department of Health Epidemiology Division. If your employee tests positive, they are mandated to quarantine and should not be told by you to report to work,” she said.

“The department’s committed to ensuring mitigation and disease spread prevention, investigations are ongoing and your business will be held accountable under the public health declaration,” she said while speaking directly to the management of businesses.

Governor Albert Bryan disclosed that roughly 8 percent of the people who actually tested positive are vaccinated and most of these people were vaccinated more than six months ago, though as stated by the V.I. Dept. of Health [the data is limited](#). “We have control over what we are doing right now, the numbers count in the hospital is about ten today in the territory and only two of those are in the ICU,” he said while painting a picture of the current Covid-19 situation.

“We do have some people who are having some difficulties but for the most part, we have been through this because there were days when we had 29 or 30 people in the hospital and we are not

seeing that as yet,” he said.

“As we look at that we're also trying to ease the pressure in the emergency room. This is an island, we only have so many doctors, so many nurses, respiratory therapists, lab people, etc. and a lot of them are getting sick, which is the reason why we always talk to people about becoming vaccinated and why the vaccine is so important,” said the governor.

Warning about the negative impact that could occur on the health care and other state-run systems if there is a proliferation of state workers becoming infected, he said that the outcome will be catastrophic.

“Once our system starts off crashing, police officers get it, corrections officers get it, doctors get it, nurses get it,” he said. “These people cannot shut their offices, but they must go out there and fight this pandemic daily. Face-to-face they are meeting people and a lot of these people are sick,” he said while calling on the community to exercise care and enforce the Covid-19 protocols.

Speaking about the impact of Covid-19 on the cruise industry, the governor said that talks are ongoing to change the percentage of infected people on cruise ships that would allow those ships to berth in the territory. The ongoing memorandum of understanding is 1 percent, but the intention is to increase it 2 percent positivity rate among passengers and crew.