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Omicron BA.2 Variant Now Dominant Strain in US; Dept. of Health Awaits Samples to Confirm Presence in USVI

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The BA.2 variant of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 on Tuesday was confirmed as the dominant strain of the coronavirus in the United States, and the V.I. Dept. of Health as of Tuesday was awaiting test samples to confirm the variant's presence in the territory.

The Omicron BA.2 variant represented more than half of all cases in the U.S. as of Tuesday with a total of 55 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The new Omicron variant, which appears to spread more easily than the original Omicron variant, has led to surges in Europe and the U.K., with England historically presaging Covid-19 outcomes in the United States.

According to the Wall Street Journal, research has suggested that BA.2 is similar to an earlier Omicron version when it comes to the risk of hospitalizations and developing severe disease. But research also indicates that BA.2 spreads more easily.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion told the Consortium Tuesday that D.O.H. was awaiting test samples to determine whether the BA.2 strain was circulating in the territory. Ms. Encarnacion also said that the mask mandate in schools, nursing homes, health facilities and ports of entry will remain in place for now. The USVI Travel Portal will also remain active, she said. Governor Albert Bryan told the Consortium earlier this month that the portal would be active [until at least June](#).

Ms. Encarnacion highlighted what she said were benefits of keeping the mask mandate in certain settings, reminding that the virus was still active in the territory.

As of Tuesday there were 42 active Covid-19 cases territory-wide, with St. Croix accounting for 31, followed by St. Thomas with 11, [according to D.O.H.](#) There were no active cases in St. John, and the territory's seven-day positivity rate stood at 2.10 percent.

Also on Tuesday, the CDC [recommended](#) a second booster shot for individuals 50 years and older.