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# Highly Contagious Omicron BA.2 Identified in U.S. Virgin Islands

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The V.I. Department of Health said Thursday it has received confirmation that seven cases of the Covid-19 Omicron subvariant BA.2 have been identified in the territory, with five cases identified on St. Croix and two on St. Thomas.

The results received today come from samples that were sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for sequencing two weeks ago. “These results represent cases that were positive almost two weeks ago,” said Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar, territorial medical director at D.O.H. “This means that the Omicron variant has been in the V.I. for a while and it should be expected that future sequencing will identify additional BA.2 cases.”

According to D.O.H., the national prevalence of this subvariant is 72 percent of all Covid-19 cases with the remaining percentage representing the original Omicron variant.

D.O.H. said the confirmed presence of the latest variant should be a clear signal for all Virgin Islanders to increase their vigilance by closely following the guidance related to wearing masks, hand washing or sanitizing, social distancing, and testing. “Testing is strongly encouraged for everyone who has been in close contact with a confirmed case of Covid-19 and especially for those who are experiencing symptoms,” stated Dr. Esther Ellis.

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.

If you suspect you have Covid-19, D.O.H. is asking that you call the COVID19 Hotline at (340) 712-6299 or (340) 776-1519 for information on scheduling a test. The Hotline is open Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Testing is also available on St. John every Wednesday from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the VI Port Authority Gravel Lot.