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Dept. of Health to Raise Dengue Fever Awareness, Gather Information on How Covid-19 Has Impacted Virgin Islanders

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An abandoned plastic bowl in a vase with stagnant water inside — a breeding ground for illnesses such as Dengue Fever. By. GETTY IMAGES

The V.I. Department of Health is set to embark on two projects aimed at educating the public about dengue fever and gathering information about the social, emotional, and financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. V.I. Dept of Health Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis made the announcement during Tuesday's weekly briefing from Government House.

“The first project is a Dengue Day event that is being conducted throughout the territory at select public and private schools. Students in grades 3-7 will benefit from dengue information, games,

giveaways, and if parental consent is obtained, they will be tested for dengue antigen,” Dr. Ellis said.

She added, “This is very important because children who have already had a first case of dengue whether they were aware of it or not are more vulnerable to severe disease if infected a second time,” she said while pointing out that periods when dengue is problematic generally happens in ten-year cycles.

The test, Dr. Ellis explained, is a blood test using samples drawn via finger stick. Parental consent is required for the department to be able to perform these tests on children, and Dr. Ellis asked parents to be on the lookout for permission slips, which will be sent home with students shortly before the territory's Dengue Day is announced. Results, she said, would be forwarded to parents via email within 24 hours.

Children whose parents do not consent for them to be tested for dengue antigens will still be able to participate in all the training and games.

Dr. Ellis noted that the last outbreak of dengue fever in the USVI occurred in 2012. With the disease generally fluctuating in prevalence in a roughly 10-year cycle, Dr. Ellis says the territory is just about due for another outbreak.

Apart from public education surrounding dengue, the Department of Health is seeking to learn more about residents' experience with Covid-19.

Dr. Ellis says the department is trying to understand the impact the virus has had on the territory, so they can make better decisions on how to focus their efforts moving forward.

“The department is trying to assess the social, emotional, and financial impact that the pandemic has had on Virgin Islands residents. Before the end of the month, you will see posters with a QR code that will give you access to the 24-question survey. Please scan the QR code and take the survey,” she said.

She further explained that residents can go to the D.O.H. website or Facebook page to access the survey. “Your participation will help the Department of Health better understand the impact that Covid-19 has had on the territory.”