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D.O.H. Identifies Omicron Subvariant BA.4 in USVI, With Preliminary Data Suggesting Presence of Omicron BA.5 as Well

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The V.I. Dept. of Health late Friday announced the presence of Omicron subvariant BA.4 in the territory, with the department advising that BA.5 may also be present based on preliminary data.

The discovery of BA.4 was confirmed following routine Covid-19 sequencing of 19 samples sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which returned with conclusive results of the BA.4 subvariant. "Preliminary reports also indicate the presence of the BA.5 subvariant, which the V.I. D.O.H. will confirm when conclusive data is available," the department said.

The CDC on Tuesday said that subvariants BA.4 and BA.5 have become the dominant strains of Covid-19 in the U.S., representing 52 percent of all cases. The original Covid-19 vaccines, which

were designed to target the original coronavirus strain, have proven to be less effective against the Omicron variant, and U.S. health regulators have directed vaccine producers to modify their vaccines to better target the latest strains.

“As we move into the fall and winter, it is critical that we have safe and effective vaccine boosters that can provide protection against circulating and emerging variants to prevent the most severe consequences of Covid-19,” said Peter Marks, director of the FDA division overseeing vaccines.

“Variants are expected to circulate while Covid remains endemic,” said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, “I ask that you continue to practice healthy behaviors and remain cautious in public spaces to prevent exposure and transmission. Vaccines are the most powerful preventative tool that is available to us. I urge the public to remain vigilant, isolate and test when feeling ill, and stay up to date with vaccinations by getting boosters when eligible.”

As of Friday there were 230 active Covid-19 cases territory-wide, with St. Croix representing a majority of the infections with 170, followed by St. Thomas with 46, and St. John with 1, [according to D.O.H.](#) The positivity rate stood at 9.34 percent.