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Monkeypox Testing Available in USVI Beginning Friday; Covid-19 on Decline; \$5.6 Million in P-EBT Issued Tuesday

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The availability of monkeypox testing and the start of the Virgin Islands 2022 Summer Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) Plan for school children were among developments announced at Monday's Government House press briefing.

V.I. Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said testing for monkeypox is expected to be available in the U.S. Virgin Islands by the end of this week.

"We are very close to being able to test for monkeypox within the territory, so by Friday we should be able to have monkey pox testing within the territory," she said Tuesday, speaking during the Bryan administration's weekly press briefing.

“We have not had any positive confirmed cases but we have had at least 15 [suspected cases] so this makes it a lot easier for us,” she said.

The U.S. as of Wednesday had a total of 26,778 confirmed cases, with two deaths related to the disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nearby Puerto Rico had 184 confirmed cases with no deaths as of Wednesday morning.

Meanwhile, Covid-19 cases in the territory have been trend lower, according to the latest data provided by D.O.H.

There were 44 total active cases territory-wide [as of Friday](#), with St. Croix accounting for 26, followed by St. Thomas with 17, and St. John with 1. The territory's seven-day positivity rate stood at 2.88 percent.

Meanwhile, the Summer Pandemic P-EBT program has been approved and benefits are to be issued using the U.S. Virgin Islands’ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to students who were enrolled in public and private schools during the last month of the 2022 school year, which began in May 2022. The students would have also had to participate in the National School Lunch Program to be eligible for a one-time payment of \$455 towards purchasing food.

P-EBT benefits are available to children who were enrolled in locally registered public, private, and parochial schools, from grades K through 12 and who have temporarily lost access to free meals due to pandemic-related school closures or due to Covid related absences.

DHS Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez said the latest program will add to the \$29 million that have been issued since 2020.

A total of \$5.6 million will be shared among eligible students and was placed on SNAP cards on Tuesday morning.

“This award is an extension of the Food and Nutrition Services – FNS – which was our approved state plan to operate pandemic EBT for our eligible school children,” Ms. Causey-Gomez shared.

She also announced plans to roll out the Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund to help others who do not qualify various assistance programs because of their salary level, adding that, “We had some funds that we wanted to make sure that those that didn’t really make the cut of the salary for some of the other benefits, this was helpful.”

She said there was an “overwhelming response of applications” to the initiative which is scheduled to start sometime next week.

“We’re going to begin that distribution next week and we’re going to have a formal schedule of who’s going to receive what and when, and we’ll do that plan by Friday,” Ms. Causey-Gomez explained.