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Covid Holiday Surge on Decline; Health Commissioner Urges Balance Between Socialization and Physical Health

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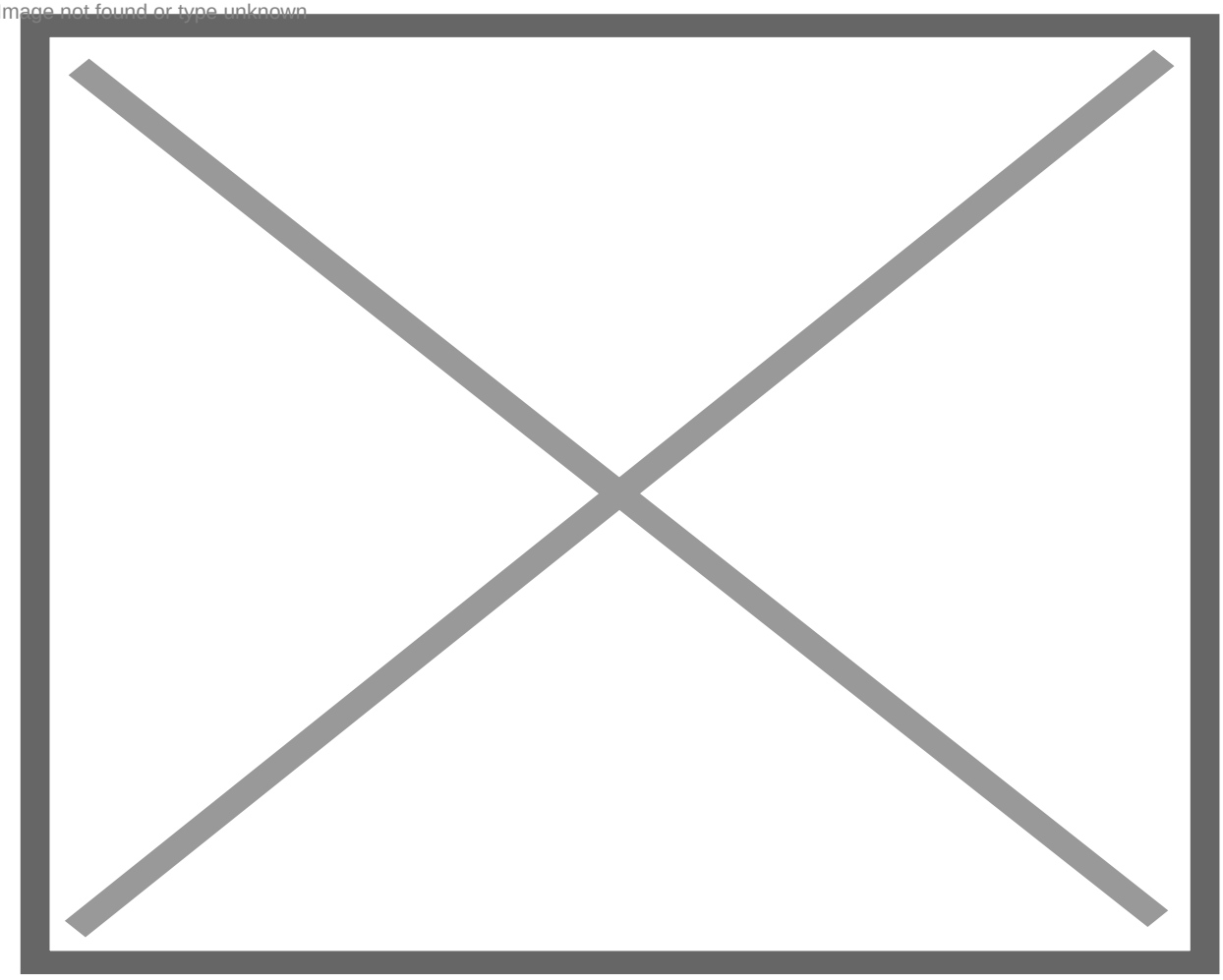

In the past three days, cases of Covid-19 have dropped significantly across the U.S. Virgin Islands.

During the weekly press briefing from Government House on Monday, Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said cases stood at 184 on Sunday, January 29th, compared with 265 on January 26th — a decline of 30 percent.

The 184 active cases include four people who have been hospitalized – three on St. Croix and one on St. Thomas.

“Our Christmas festival brought much needed time with family and friends; it satisfied our needs to just be outside and have some fun. It was also followed by a surge in active cases in St Croix,” Ms. Encarnacion said.

People aged 30-49 are significantly represented among recent cases, the health commissioner said. Geographically, St. Croix continues to record the most cases with 146, followed by 37 in St. Thomas and one on St. John. To date, 129 people have died from Covid-related illness in the territory.

According to the department’s latest statistics, although the majority of the Covid cases on record (12,636) have been detected on St. Croix, fatality numbers on St. Thomas have been higher — to date, 53 people have died on St. Croix including two deaths over the last four weeks, compared to 71 on St. Thomas.

On St. John, five people have died while 1,026 have recovered after contracting the virus.

Ms. Encarnacion continues to warn residents about the importance of balancing the need for socialization with physical health. She reminded that although Covid is in its endemic stage, the risk of contracting the virus remains high.

As a virus endemic to the territory now, people will continue to be infected and become ill with Covid, but in relatively stable numbers that can be managed by a country’s health system, she said.

Meanwhile, the department believes that it may soon receive confirmation of the detection of the strain of Covid-19 that requires treatment using the bivalent vaccine.

Bivalent vaccines provide better protection against Omicron subvariants BA.4/5 which have become the dominant strain in many countries including the U.S.

“Today, there have been no confirmed cases of either of the Omicron variants, however given the high numbers of active cases territory-wide and the variants on the mainland, we may soon receive confirmatory tests of these variants from samples that we sent to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for sequencing,” she explained.

Authorized bivalent formulations of the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccines are available for use as a single booster dose free of charge through the health department.

Ms. Encarnacion stressed the need for residents to take the bivalent vaccine especially since the CDC announced that Covid-19 mutations have rendered some treatments including all Monoclonal Antibody Treatments ineffective.

This is because as Covid-19 continues to mutate, changes to its genetic code have made the virus more proficient at escaping treatment.

“The Monoclonal Antibody Treatment, for instance, that saved so many lives are not effective for the Omicron variants and have been discontinued," she said. The medication used for pre-exposure prophylaxis for Covid prevention is no longer authorized for emergency use due to resistance against the Covid variants."

Ms. Encarnacion warned that the removal of these treatments is why it has become more important for people to get vaccinated and boosted with the bivalent vaccine.

The USVI continues to be among states and territories with the lowest vaccination rate across the United States.

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