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As End to Public Health Emergency Looms, Health Commissioner Discusses Implications for USVI

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Get your vaccines while they're still free. That was the message from Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, who discussed the upcoming end of the federal Covid-19 public health emergency in a government press briefing on Monday.

On May 11, 2023 President Joe Biden plans to end both the national emergency and the public health emergency declarations related to Covid-19. Could this mean the end of state-subsidized vaccines?

That is certainly a possibility, since the reversion to the pre-pandemic status quo means doing away with measures that made healthcare more widely available to residents on the mainland and its dependent territories.

However, Ms. Encarnacion said the territory would be able to continue programs like lab testing since Covid-19 funding had been approved for those activities until the year 2025. She said because of that, the department will be able to continue a lot of the services locally.

“We have purchased a lot of the testing equipment and supplies so we'll be able to go beyond that,” the health commissioner said.

Contract nurses are however expected to be affected by the change. The department, Ms. Encarnacion stated, is working to have them seconded to different agencies.

“It is going to affect, for example, Pafford staffing within the hospitals, and so we're working closely with the hospitals to ensure that they go on to separate contracts with either Pafford or other staffing agencies,” she explained.

Ms. Encarnacion also made her customary call for residents to take the bivalent vaccine so that they are protected against even the most aggressive forms of Covid-19.