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# Dept. of Health Goes Weekly With Covid Reports as Virus Footprint Diminishes; Six Schools Piloting 'Influenza-Like Illness' Testing Program

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The V.I. Department of Health will be dropping its epidemiological report on Covid-19 from daily down to weekly, said VIDOH Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, as she appeared at Government House's weekly press briefing on Monday.

The move comes amid continuing low positivity in the Covid-19 rate territory-wide, currently at 2.5 percent, which has remained low since the winter surge abated last month. There are 16 active cases territory-wide (8 on St. Thomas, 7 on St. Croix, 1 on St. John), and only three of these require hospitalization — all at the Schneider Regional Medical Centre on St. Thomas.

Because “our data continues to indicate that the territory’s Covid numbers are trending downward with minimal fluctuation,” according to Dr. Ellis, VIDOH officials have decided to switch to a weekly reporting frequency. The reports will continue to be made available on the [VIDOH website](#).

Meanwhile, Dr. Ellis reported that six elementary schools will serve as test schools for the rollout of the department’s “Influenza-like Illness” pilot program. Students of Claude O. Markoe Elementary and Good Hope Country Day schools on St. Croix, VI Montessori and Lockhart Elementary schools on St. Thomas, and Giffit Hill Elementary and Julius E. Sprauve schools on St. John will all be offered free testing for influenza-A, influenza-B, RSV, and Covid-19, once they have parental permission.

“Families who participate will receive a link to their students’ test results directly to their cell phone or email address...within 24 to 48 hours in most cases,” said Dr. Ellis. Apart from the testing, DOH will use absentee data from the schools to gather information about respiratory, gastrointestinal and other illnesses that may be affecting student populations. “This data will be used to customize prevention strategies and deploy the treatment resources to school with outbreaks,” said Dr. Ellis. She noted that the data would also be used to develop a dashboard, which could then be consulted by administrators, parents, and the wider community “to inform decision making around activities and prevention strategies.”

In a territory-wide push, the V.I. Dept. of Health was able to deliver 17,000 Covid-19 home testing kits to students, to be used in the household as needed. “The second round of distribution is currently underway,” Dr. Ellis informed.

Dr. Ellis repeated the encouragement from healthcare officials that vaccines remain the best protection against Covid-19, and urged residents to receive their influenza vaccinations as well.