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V.I. Dept. of Health Reports Uptick in Cases, Shifts Focus to Long COVID as Public Health Emergency Nears End

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The V.I. Dept. of Health on Monday reported a slight increase in active Covid-19 cases across the territory, with a positivity rate of 3.3 percent.

The total number of active cases stands at 10, with six on St. Croix, four on St. Thomas, and none on St. John. Additionally, the Department confirmed the recent death of a 62-year-old St. Thomas woman due to Covid-19, raising the death toll to 131.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion emphasized the importance of getting vaccinated and boosted against Covid-19 while supplies last. Although the public health emergency is set to end on May 11, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will extend benefits to ensure

continued access to the vaccine and treatment. The VI Department of Health said it will continue providing free Covid-19 vaccines for everyone aged six months and older, as long as supplies are available.

For information on vaccination locations and times, the department has provided contact numbers for St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John: 340-718-1311 on St. Croix, 340-774-7477 for adults on St. Thomas, and 340-777-8804 ext. 2600 for children on St. Thomas. On St. John, visit the V.I. Port Authority Gravel Lot, on Wednesdays, between 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

The VI Health Department also noted that once the public health emergency concludes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will no longer monitor Covid-19 in local communities. However, the CDC will continue tracking Covid-19 and sharing data, albeit with reduced frequency in some areas.

As the end of the public health emergency approaches, D.O.H. says it is shifting its focus to the potential long-term effects of Covid-19. Known as Long Covid, this multifaceted disease can affect nearly every organ in the body, with approximately 200 identified symptoms. Long Covid symptoms can develop up to four weeks after the initial infection and may manifest as new-onset chronic diseases or mental and neurological conditions.

Ms. Encarnacion warned that Long Covid symptoms could relapse and progressively worsen over time, potentially leading to severe and life-threatening episodes months or years after the infection. The department also plans to track long Covid cases in the territory and provide support to healthcare providers as recommendations are developed.

Those experiencing persistent symptoms after a Covid-19 infection should report them to their doctor. The best protection against developing long Covid is to get vaccinated against Covid-19 and stay up-to-date with current booster recommendations.