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THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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PRESS RELEASE

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Virgin Islands Health Department Announces First Confirmed COVID-19 Death on St. Thomas

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ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health is deeply saddened to announce confirmation of the territory's first confirmed COVID-19 death and two new confirmed cases of COVID-19 disease on St. Thomas. This brings the territory's total confirmed cases to 42 — 12 on Croix, 28 on St. Thomas, and two on St. John.

The deceased is an 85-year-old male St. Thomas resident with underlying medical conditions. He unknowingly came into contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case that traveled to the island from Anguilla. He was not hospitalized at the time of his death and died at home.

"We are saddened by the news of the territory's first confirmed COVID-19 death. On behalf of my staff at the Department of Health, I send my deepest condolences to the family of the deceased," said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

While this death was not a result of community transmission, persons may come in contact with someone who is infected unbeknownst to them. By avoiding contact with others, avoiding non-essential travel, and practicing good hand hygiene and other precautionary measures like social distancing, you can limit your risk of spreading and also acquiring this disease.

Most confirmed cases are travel-related, so it is especially critical to self-quarantine after travel while monitoring your symptoms. During this self-monitoring period, it is important to avoid

close contact with others, including those you may live with. Even for non-travelers, it is paramount to understand the risk of transmission among those you may have close contact with. Physical distancing is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, “Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected.” Social distancing, according to the CDC, is “remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet) from others when possible.

Persons Under Investigation Update

- Total Tested: 266
- Positive: 42 (28 STT; 12 STX; 2 STJ)

Transmission:

- STT: 7 travel; 9 community; 9 contact with confirmed case; 3 under investigation
- STX: 9 travel; 1 community; 1 contact with confirmed case; 1 under investigation
- STJ: 2 travel; 0 community; 0 contact with confirmed case; 0 under investigation

Negative: 206 (121 STT; 77 STX; 8 STJ)

Pending: 18 (15 STT; 0 STX; 3 STJ)

Recovered: 34

Death: 1

Health officials, in collaboration with other agencies, have been closely monitoring the global outbreak and building capacity to prevent the spread of the disease in the territory and respond to positive cases.

The department’s Epidemiology Division continues to provide testing for cases that meet the Person Under Investigation (PUI) criteria, conduct contact tracing and assist healthcare providers and the public with up-to-date information and guidelines about what to do to prevent additional cases.

While the risk of severe illness for most is low, the risk for transmission is high and precautions must still be taken to avoid widespread transmission within the community. A person may also get COVID-19 by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

To avoid COVID-19 and help prevent its spread, Department of Health officials recommend the following steps:

- Limit socializing and close contact with others, as persons without symptoms can still transmit the virus.

- While sick, avoid contact with others.
- Avoid persons with cold or flu-like symptoms.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue. Wash your hands immediately. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60 percent alcohol.

COVID-19 symptoms reported include fever, cough and shortness of breath. It spreads mostly between people who are in close contact via respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Persons who have contracted COVID-19 are most likely to spread it when they are most symptomatic. This means they are more likely to spread it to others when they are sick.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently recommends avoiding non-essential travel to any location, as well as no cruise ship travel. Postponing vacations to the territory will also lessen the impact of COVID-19 on our small community. If you are returning home to the USVI, you must quarantine for 14 days and self-monitor your symptoms. Older adults and those with underlying health issues are particularly vulnerable and should avoid crowded places and non-essential air travel to decrease their risk for virus transmission.

If you are experiencing symptoms, such as a cough, fever and shortness of breath, and have traveled anywhere in the last 14 days, OR if you have had contact with a confirmed case please self-quarantine and call 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519 from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Sunday.

These phone numbers are only to be used if you meet the criteria above and suspect you may have the virus. You will be given instructions on what to do next and that may include isolating yourself from others.

If you have a medical emergency, call 911.

For more information, visit: doh.vi.gov/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19. For updates, text COVID19USVI to 888777.

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