



**GOVERNMENT OF  
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

**VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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For Immediate Release

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**Department of Health Closely Monitoring Coronavirus**

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**ST. CROIX, USVI (January 27, 2020)** —The Virgin Islands Department of Health has been monitoring the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) since initial reports of an outbreak of respiratory illness was first identified in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The Department is taking necessary steps to protect Virgin Islands residents.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Chinese authorities identified the new coronavirus, which has resulted in more than a thousand confirmed cases in China, including cases outside Wuhan City. Additional cases have been identified in a growing number of other international locations, including the mainland United States. Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world. Seven different coronaviruses, that scientists know of, can infect people and cause illness. Human coronaviruses commonly cause mild to moderate illness in people worldwide, however, two newer human coronaviruses, MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV, have been known to frequently cause severe illness.

While there are no reported cases in the Caribbean region, including the United States Virgin Islands, Health Department officials remain vigilant by actively monitoring the situation and encourage residents and visitors to do the same and to follow its guidelines.

The Epidemiology Division, led by Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, is monitoring the novel coronavirus outbreak closely, conducting surveillance, and will assist with laboratory testing and contact tracing as needed to quickly contain any possible cases.

The Department of Health has shared guidance based on the public health response from the CDC and has provided training to staff at the Juan F. Luis Hospital and the Schneider Regional Medical Center. DOH will be providing in-person training to all clinics across the territory.

If you or someone you know has traveled to Wuhan City, China or come in close contact with someone who is under investigation or is a laboratory-confirmed 2019-nCoV patient, symptoms to look out for include fever AND symptoms of lower respiratory illness like a cough or shortness of breath OR symptoms of fever or lower respiratory illness like a cough or shortness of breath. If you meet these criteria, call ahead before going to see a doctor or emergency room and tell them your symptoms and that you were in Wuhan.

“It is our hope that we will not have any cases of this virus within our jurisdiction. However, it is necessary for us to be prepared and mindful, nonetheless,” added Medical Director Dr. Marc Jerome.

Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion warns residents that while the novel coronavirus should be taken seriously, residents should also take precaution to avoid the spread of influenza by getting the flu vaccine, washing hands with soap and water, covering your nose and mouth when coughing and using a flexed elbow when sneezing, and avoiding close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms. Encarnacion recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Hubei Province, China, including Wuhan.

Department of Tourism Director of Communications Alani Henneman-Todman stated that Tourism is also closely monitoring the situation and will continue to be in close dialogue with the Health Department. “While we promote tourism and encourage travel to and from the Virgin Islands, we encourage travelers to take precaution with their health and the health of others and to follow Department of Health guidelines,” stated Henneman-Todman.

The Virgin Islands Port Authority is also in close communication with the Health Department and has received guidance on the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus.

The Department of Health will continue to monitor the outbreak.

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