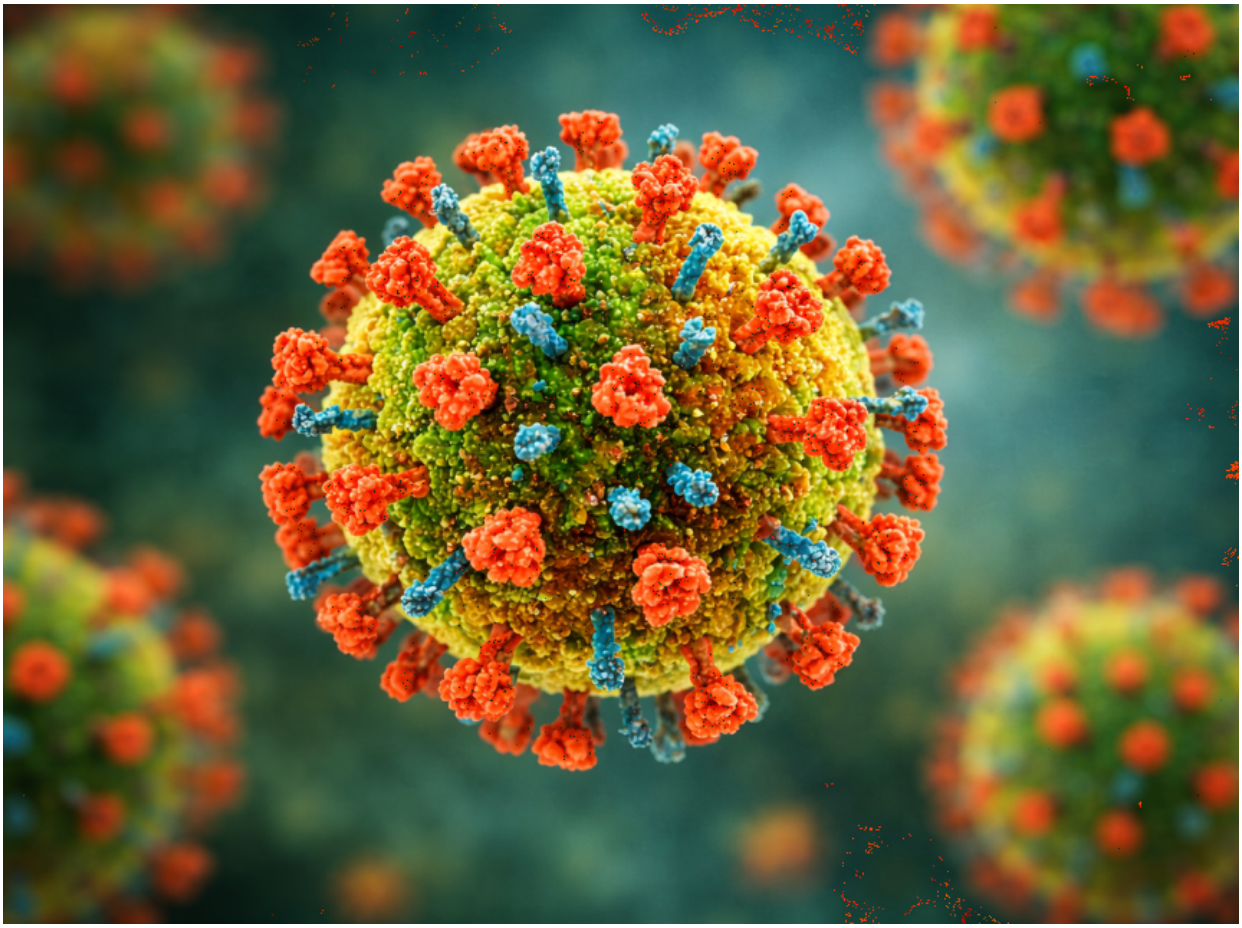
GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

Tel: (284)468-2730
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Ministry of Health Alerting Residents to be on Influenza Alert

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National Epidemiologist Ms. Harmonie Brewley-Massiah has said that global and regional surveillance confirmed increased circulation of Influenza A, which is known to spread easily and cause more severe illness in unvaccinated populations.

While the BVI has not reached epidemic levels, local health facilities are reporting an increase in persons presenting with fever and respiratory symptoms. “Right now, we are seeing more flu-like illness in our community but the reported case numbers have not exceeded what is normally expected for this time of year**.”** Ms. Brewley-Massiah explained. This she said gives us a critical opportunity to act early, strengthen prevention and reduce the risk of widespread transmission.

Influenza remains a serious respiratory illness that can lead to hospitalization and complications, especially among older adults, young children, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic or weakened health conditions.

“Global data show that many of the most severe cases are occurring among people who were not vaccinated. Vaccination remains our strongest line of defense but it must be supported by other preventive measures such as good hand hygiene, regular cleaning of high-touch surfaces, staying home when ill and reducing exposure risks,” Ms. Brewley-Massiah said.

Influenza is spread primarily through respiratory droplets when infected persons cough, sneeze, or talk, as well as through contact with contaminated surfaces. Symptoms typically appear within one to four days and may include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, fatigue, and headaches. Some cases may also experience vomiting or diarrhea.

The National Epidemiologist is also encouraging schools and early childhood centres to remain vigilant and report unusually high absenteeism or clusters of illness to the Public Health Unit at 468-2285.

“Early reporting allows us to assess situations quickly and prevent further spread within schools and the wider community,” she said.

Residents are advised to take the following steps to reduce risk:

- Get vaccinated against influenza

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Avoid close contact with persons who are ill
- Stay home when experiencing flu-like symptoms
- Cover coughs and sneezes properly and wash hands afterward
- Consider wearing a mask in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces

Persons planning to travel are advised to ensure that their vaccinations are up to date, practice good hygiene, wear masks in crowded spaces and avoid travel if unwell.

Members of the public should seek immediate medical attention if they experience difficulty breathing, chest pain, persistent high fever, confusion, severe weakness, or worsening symptoms.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary. Residents are encouraged to follow official guidance and remain proactive in protecting themselves, their families, and the wider community.

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