GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

# PRESS RELEASE

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# Health Ministry Reporting Increase in Respiratory Infections In Young Children

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The Ministry of Health and Social Development is advising the public of an increase in respiratory tract infections among young children across the Territory.

Respiratory tract infections affect the nose, throat, airways, or lungs and are most often caused by viruses. These illnesses are common among young children whose immune systems are still developing and who spend time in close contact with others in childcare and school settings.

National Epidemiologist Ms. Harmonie Brewley said childcare centres have reported a noticeable rise in children presenting with symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, diarrhea, fatigue, irritability, and decreased activity. She said since the start of the school term, reporting centres have indicated that between 60 and 90 percent of children have been absent at least once due to illness.

Ms. Harmonie Brewley-Massiah explained that these environments can easily facilitate the spread of infections through respiratory droplets from coughing, sneezing, or talking, as well as through contact with contaminated surfaces such as toys, tables, or door handles.

“Childcare settings are well recognised as environments where respiratory infections can spread easily. Group size, room layout, ventilation, and duration of exposure all influence transmission,” Ms. Brewley-Massiah stated.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to monitor children closely for signs of more serious illness. Children who are premature, under two years of age with chronic lung or heart conditions, or who are immunocompromised may be at greater risk.

Parents should seek medical care if a child develops a fever of 37.8°C or higher, persistent cough, difficulty feeding, rapid or laboured breathing, wheezing, or unusual drowsiness.

Parents and caregivers are also reminded to keep children at home when they are unwell, practice proper cough and sneeze etiquette, and encourage frequent handwashing. Children should only return to childcare when they are fever-free

and feeling well.  Ms. Brewley-Massiah added, “When children attend childcare while ill, infections can spread quickly to other children and staff, including those who may be more vulnerable to complications. Keeping unwell children at home helps childcare centers maintain their illness policies and supports a safer environment for all children.”

The ministry continues to monitor the situation closely and urges the public to remain vigilant in practicing preventive measures to protect children, families, and the wider community.

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