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## Government Agencies Strengthen Public Health Preparedness/ Border Response

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The Ministry of Health and Social Development recently convened a multi-sector stakeholder workshop aimed at strengthening the Territory's Public Health Preparedness and Border Health Operations Framework.

Held on Friday, June 5, the workshop brought together representatives from public health, health services, environmental health, immigration, customs, ports, airports, emergency medical services, communications, and other key partner agencies to review and enhance the Virgin Islands' preparedness and response arrangements for infectious diseases and other public health threats.

The collaborative session focused on assessing preparedness measures for diseases with epidemic potential, including Ebola Virus Disease, hantavirus, respiratory illnesses, and other emerging health threats that may impact the Territory.

Participants examined key components of the proposed framework, including governance structures, operational procedures, communication systems, border health measures, emergency coordination mechanisms and information-sharing processes. Discussions also identified opportunities to strengthen interagency collaboration, workforce readiness, operational resilience, and long-term sustainability.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ronald Georges emphasized that the workshop represented an important step in strengthening the Territory's ability to effectively respond to public health emergencies. *"The objective of this exercise was not simply to review a document,"* Dr. Georges stated. *"It was to ensure that the Virgin Islands has a practical, coordinated and sustainable system capable of responding to infectious disease threats regardless of their source or mode of transmission."*

Dr. Georges further noted that the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to shape preparedness planning across the Territory. *"One of the most important lessons from the pandemic is that preparedness systems must be able to withstand pressure, scale and duration. This framework is designed to strengthen our ability to work across agencies, share information effectively and respond efficiently to evolving public health threats,"* Dr. Georges revealed.

Recommendations and feedback gathered during the workshop will be incorporated into the draft framework. The next phase of work will focus on the development and review of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), training and simulation exercises, capacity assessments, and ongoing preparedness planning.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development extends sincere thanks to all participating agencies and stakeholders for their valuable contributions and continued commitment to strengthening the Virgin Islands' public health preparedness and emergency response capabilities.

“Protecting public health requires a coordinated and sustained effort. Through strong partnerships, proactive planning, and continued investment in preparedness, the Virgin Islands is building a more resilient health system capable of safeguarding the health and wellbeing of all residents,” Dr. Georges concluded.

*The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to protecting and promoting the health and social wellbeing of the people of the Virgin Islands.*

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