GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement on HIV, Sexual Health and Personal Responsibility in the Virgin Islands

Release Date: 20 August, 2026

Statement by the Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ronald Georges

On HIV, Sexual Health and Personal Responsibility in the Virgin Islands

20 August 2026

The Ministry of Health and Social Development's recent "Wrap It Up Before You Wuk It Up" campaign focused attention on safer sexual behaviour during the festival period. Festival has ended, but the public-health concern has not.

Four new cases of HIV have been identified in the Virgin Islands so far this year. Public-health investigations have identified interconnected sexual networks and behaviours that create opportunities for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to spread. These cases are not presently considered an outbreak, but the findings reinforce the need for increased awareness, testing, prevention and personal responsibility.

Of particular concern are sex without condoms, unprotected casual encounters with new partners, multiple and overlapping sexual partnerships, transactional sexual relationships involving the exchange of sex for money or resources, sexual activity involving alcohol or other substances, and transmission among key populations, including men who have sex with men.

Please Be Reminded

Many STIs, including HIV, may cause no symptoms at all. A person can look and feel well while carrying an infection, and meeting someone through social media does not make an encounter safer. Trust, familiarity, appearance or the belief that a relationship is exclusive are not substitutes for knowing your status.

A person may have only one sexual partner but still be connected, through that partner, to several others. When partnerships overlap and condoms are not used consistently, an infection can move through a network without anyone knowing how they are connected. Your risk depends not only on your partners, but also on their partners.

Knowing your status also brings a responsibility to others. A person who knows, or has good reason to believe, that they carry HIV or another STI, and who then has sex without disclosing that risk, without using protection, or without following treatment advice, places their partner's health in danger. Deliberately or recklessly exposing another person to infection is a serious breach of trust and, depending on the circumstances, also carry legal consequences.

What You Should Do

Know your status.

If you have had unprotected sex (even with a committed partnership), a new or casual partner, multiple or overlapping partners, engaged in transactional sex, or otherwise believe you may have been exposed, get tested.

Use protection.

Use condoms consistently and correctly, particularly with new or casual partners.

If Public Health contacts you, respond.

Being contacted does not mean that you have HIV or that you have done something wrong. It means you may have been exposed and should be tested. Partner notification is confidential, and Public Health does not disclose who identified you as a contact.

If you are diagnosed, remain in care and protect others

HIV and many other STIs are manageable, but this depends on staying in care, complying with treatment, following clinical advice, notifying partners through the confidential processes available, and using barrier methods when sexually active.

If you engage in higher-risk sexual behaviour, get tested.

Consent and Safeguarding

Sexual health also depends on respect for consent and the law. The general age of consent in the Virgin Islands is 16, and sexual activity with a person under the age of 16 is illegal.

For persons aged 16 and over, consent must be freely and meaningfully given. Someone who is unconscious, or whose intoxication or impairment prevents them from understanding, choosing or communicating a decision, cannot give meaningful consent. Consent should never be assumed because sex occurred previously, because someone did not resist, or because money, gifts, transportation or accommodation were provided.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to speak openly with young people about sexual health, consent, healthy relationships, online safety and transactional sex.

There is also increasing concern about STI risk among adolescents and young adults, including transactional sexual activity with older adults. Relationships with imbalance of power can lead to the use of money, gifts, transportation, accommodation or other benefits to obtain sexual access to vulnerable persons. Such situations may raise serious consent, safeguarding, and legal concerns.

Get Tested

Confidential counselling and rapid HIV testing are available through:

Public Health Unit: 468-2282
BVI Red Cross: 494-6349

A rapid HIV test does not test for all STIs, and a negative result very soon after an exposure may not rule out infection, because HIV tests have a window period. Please tell the healthcare provider when the exposure occurred so that the appropriate testing and repeat-testing schedule can be recommended.

Persons seeking broader STI testing should speak with a healthcare professional about the tests appropriate to their circumstances.

We must avoid stigma, but we must also be clear about personal responsibility. HIV and many other sexually transmitted infections are manageable, and transmission falls when people know their status, comply with treatment and prevention advice, notify partners appropriately, and take reasonable steps to protect others.

The message is simple: know your status. Use protection. Reduce your risk. Respect consent and the law. If Public Health contacts you, get tested. If you are

diagnosed, remain in care and protect others.

For Additional Information Contact:

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Additional Documents or Media

- 20260820_statement_sexual_health.pdf