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# Ministry of Health Monitoring Hantavirus Situation Risk to BVI Remains Low

**Release Date:** 12 May, 2026

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is closely monitoring a reported Hantavirus cluster linked to a cruise vessel outside of the Caribbean region and is reassuring the public that the current risk to the Virgin Islands remains low.

According to regional and international public health updates, a small number of cases, including severe illness, have been identified among passengers and crew aboard a vessel currently outside the Caribbean. As of early May, there have been eight reported cases, including three confirmed and three deaths, associated with this incident.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ronald Georges emphasized that while the situation is being taken seriously, there is no immediate cause for concern locally.

“At this time, the risk to the Caribbean, including the Virgin Islands, is considered low. However, we are working in collaboration with regional partners including the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), to utilize enhanced surveillance systems to monitor potential health threats associated with travel and tourism. Which according to the CMO include early warning systems that allow for the rapid detection of illnesses on vessels before arrival, enabling timely public health

response and decision-making. Port health teams also remain engaged in routine inspections and preparedness protocols to ensure the continued protection of public health.

Hantavirus is a rare but potentially serious disease primarily transmitted through contact with infected rodents or their droppings, urine, or saliva. Human-to-human transmission is extremely uncommon.

Health officials note that the virus is typically associated with specific rodent species not commonly found in Caribbean environments, further reducing the likelihood of local transmission.

Dr. Georges noted that while the risk remains low, the Ministry is encouraging residents to remain mindful of general prevention practices, particularly around rodent control.

The public is advised to:

- Avoid contact with rodents and areas where rodents may be present
- Safely clean and disinfect areas contaminated by rodent droppings or urine
- Ensure proper waste disposal and sanitation practices
- Seek medical attention if experiencing symptoms such as fever or respiratory distress

Early symptoms of Hantavirus can resemble the flu but may progress to more serious respiratory complications if not addressed promptly.

“We will continue to work closely with regional and international partners to ensure that any potential risks are identified early and managed effectively. Protecting the health and safety of our residents remains our top priority.” Dr. Georges noted.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to protecting and promoting the health and social well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands through effective policies, sustainable programmes, and strategic partnerships that support a safe, healthy, and resilient society.

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