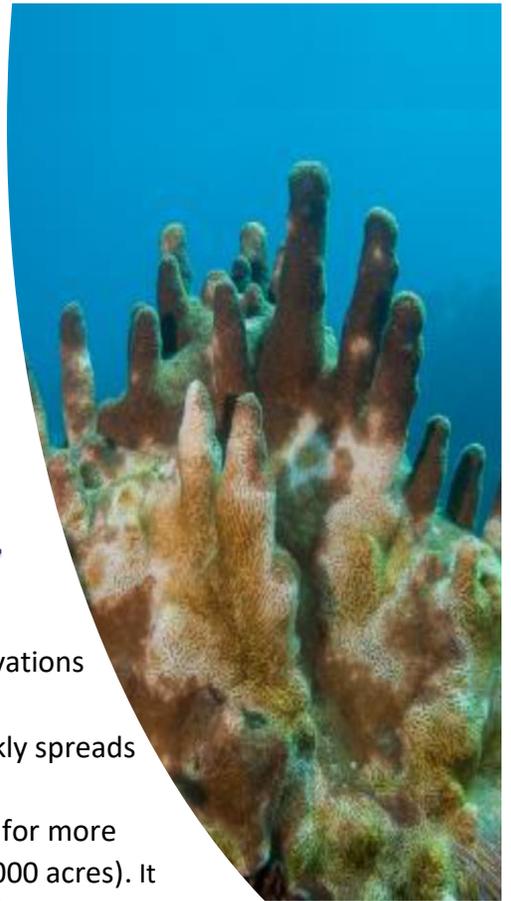




# USVI Coral Disease Outbreak

**Coral reefs in the Virgin Islands are essential for thriving economies, resilient shorelines, and prosperous communities.**

**In early 2019, St. Thomas reefs began experiencing an unprecedented lethal coral disease outbreak that is quickly spreading throughout the region. The USVI Department of Planning and Natural Resources is working with partners from federal and local agencies, universities, and members of the community to investigate and address this devastating epidemic.**



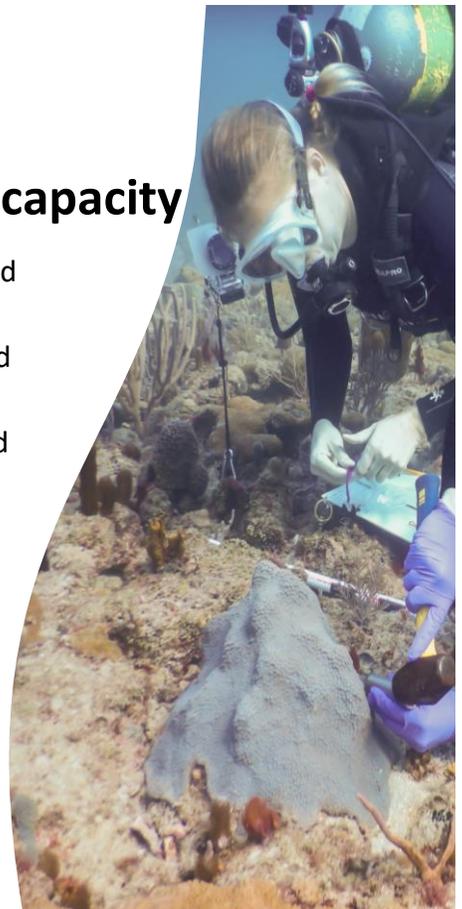
## **Key factors contributing to the severity of this outbreak:**

- **High rates of mortality.** Once a coral begins to lose living tissue, observations show that the colony will die within weeks to months.
- **Rapid spread of disease.** When disease is transmitted to a reef, it quickly spreads throughout the coral community.
- **Long duration and geographic range.** Disease has continued to spread for more than five years, affecting more than 2/3 of the Florida Reef Tract (>96,000 acres). It has now spread to Mexico, Jamaica, Sint Maarten, Dominican Republic, and the USVI.
- **High number of coral species affected.** The majority of USVI's reef-building corals are susceptible.

*Once the living coral dies, the reef structure it has built quickly erodes, removing the fish habitat and shoreline protection value with it.*

## **Support is needed to enhance disease response capacity**

- **Recognize the value** of coral reefs for coastal protection, food security, and tourism industry.
- **Educate your staff and customers** about the urgent need to search for and recognize this disease on St. Croix.
- **Work with local partners** to search for and report negative, suspicious and positive sightings of SCTL D on St. Croix.
- **Support identification, intervention, and restoration “strike” teams** to conduct large-scale intervention and/or restoration activities as able.
- **Abide by all decontamination protocols** once the disease is present.
- **Report any questionable sightings** to [austen.stovall@dpr.vi.gov](mailto:austen.stovall@dpr.vi.gov) or use BleachWatch VI/[reefconnect.org](http://reefconnect.org); **include GPS coordinates and photos.**



**For More Information Visit:** <https://dpr.vi.gov/czm/sctld/>

Thank you for supporting our coral reefs!