

## U.S. Virgin Islands' Diabetes Crisis among Blacks: Today and Future Trends

Diabetes is a very serious and rapidly growing problem for Blacks. They have about an 80% greater risk for developing the disease during their lifetimes than non-Hispanic whites.<sup>17</sup> In 2010, more than 10,760 Blacks living in the U.S. Virgin Islands had diabetes.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 4,000 of them were undiagnosed<sup>1</sup> and possibly beginning to suffer from the common complications of diabetes, including eye, kidney, lower extremity, and heart damage.<sup>3</sup>

Type 2 diabetes is becoming a common disease for many adults, and it is even beginning to affect school-aged children. Forty percent of Black boys and 49% of girls will develop diabetes during their lifetimes<sup>7</sup> and therefore face the possibility of severe diabetes-related complications<sup>6</sup> and a life span that is reduced by 4 to 23 years.<sup>7</sup> Blacks have at least twice the risk of amputations, renal failure, and death due to their diabetes compared to non-Hispanic whites.<sup>18</sup>

In 2010, another 20,960 Black Virgin Islanders had pre-diabetes,<sup>1</sup> a condition in which the blood sugar level is higher than normal but not yet in the range for diabetes.<sup>4</sup> Many scientific studies have shown that relatively simple life-style changes, such as modest weight loss and increases in regular physical activity, can often prevent pre-diabetes from progressing to diabetes or significantly delay its onset by as much as 58%.<sup>14</sup> However, if they do not take action, individuals with pre-diabetes can often progress to diabetes within 10 years.<sup>4</sup> So if current trends continue, the number of Black Virgin Islanders with diabetes is projected to increase to 15,860 by 2025.<sup>1</sup>

### Pre-Diabetes and Diabetes Trends<sup>1</sup> among Black U.S. Virgin Islanders

<b>Black U.S. Virgin Islander Diabetes Data and Forecasts</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>Population</b>	82,300	84,000
<b>Pre-diabetes</b>	20,960	21,400
<b>Diagnosed diabetes</b>	6,760	11,560
<b>Undiagnosed diabetes</b>	4,000	4,300
<b>Total with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed)</b>	10,760	15,860
<b>Complications:</b>		
<b>Visual impairment</b>	1,200	1,970
<b>Renal failure</b>	27	39
<b>Leg amputations</b>	33	41
<b>Annual deaths attributable to diabetes</b>	155	200

We now understand more about delaying or even preventing the onset of diabetes as well as how to effectively treat it, both of which can result in a dramatic reduction in complications and premature death.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Reducing the future burden of diabetes in the U.S. Virgin Islands depends upon the promotion of targeted screening for asymptomatic adults to identify those with pre-diabetes and undiagnosed diabetes, improved access to quality medical care, and increased patient compliance with therapy.<sup>14,15,16</sup> However, halting the “twin epidemics” of diabetes and obesity will also require

fundamental change in all segments of society, including greater access to opportunities for physical activity in our schools, workplaces, and communities and a significant shift in our current diet away from sugar, salt, refined carbohydrates, and saturated fats and toward more fruits and vegetables.<sup>15</sup> In short, we all play an important role in conquering diabetes.

These forecasts are based on available national diabetes data, including population projections extrapolated to the territory, and the CDC's 2011 National Diabetes Fact Sheet and latest diabetes prevalence projections to 2050. They assume a steady, but conservative, reduction in the number of people with complications due to better awareness of the risks of diabetes, earlier screening and intervention, and more effective therapies.

**For endnote references and details on the Institute for Alternative Futures Diabetes 2025 Forecasting Model Methodology, visit [www.altfutures.org/diabetes2025](http://www.altfutures.org/diabetes2025).**

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