

In 2010, there were 13,500 people in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) with diabetes.¹ Some 5,010 of them were undiagnosed¹ and possibly beginning to suffer from the common complications of diabetes, including eye, kidney, lower extremity, and heart damage.³ Another 27,950 people had pre-diabetes,¹ a condition in which the blood sugar level is higher than normal but not yet in the range for diabetes.⁴ If they do not take action, individuals with pre-diabetes can often progress to diabetes within 10 years.⁴

Diabetes is frequently associated with obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and depression.^{4,5} It can result in many debilitating complications⁶ and shorten life span by about 4 to 23 years depending on age, sex, and ethnicity.⁷ About 68% of deaths among seniors with diabetes are due to heart disease and 16% are due to a stroke related to their disease.⁶ In 2010, some 1,520 people in the USVI were visually impaired, some even blind, because of diabetes.¹ Another 32 developed kidney failure, and 40 people underwent lower extremity amputations as a result of their diabetes.¹ On the whole, diabetes contributed to more than 180 deaths.¹

The risk of developing diabetes is much higher as one gets older, especially after the age of 45.⁸ There were 9,330 seniors²⁴ living in the USVI in 2010 and approximately 77% of them had either diabetes or pre-diabetes.⁶ Of the 2,510 seniors living with diabetes in 2010, some 1,830 had diagnosed diabetes and another 680 had diabetes that had not yet been diagnosed¹ and was possibly beginning to cause organ damage.³ The 4,660 seniors in the USVI with pre-diabetes¹ also were largely unaware of their condition⁹ and continue to have a significant risk of eventually developing diabetes.⁴

The American Diabetes Association recommends that testing for diabetes be considered for adults of any age who are overweight or obese and also have one or more risk factors for diabetes. For those without these risk factors, testing should begin at age 45. If test results are normal, repeat testing should occur at least every three years.¹⁰ The risk of diabetes increases as one gets older,⁸ so it is especially important for seniors to be tested for diabetes – a benefit that Medicare now covers.¹¹

We now understand more about delaying or even preventing the onset of diabetes as well as how to effectively treat it, resulting in a dramatic reduction of complications and premature death.^{12,13,14} In fact, many scientific studies have shown that relatively simple lifestyle changes, such as modest weight loss and increases in regular physical activity, can often prevent those most at risk, including those with pre-diabetes, from developing diabetes, or significantly delay the onset of the disease.^{14,15}

Reducing the future burden of diabetes in the USVI depends upon the promotion of targeted screening of asymptomatic adults to identify those with pre-diabetes and undiagnosed diabetes, improved access to quality medical care, and increased patient compliance with therapy.^{14,15,16} 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.¹⁵ In short, we all play an important role in conquering diabetes.

U.S. Virgin Islands Diabetes Data and Forecasts¹	2000	2010	2015	2025
Population	108,600	109,750	111,000	112,000
Pre-diabetes	15,820	27,950	28,270	28,530
Diagnosed diabetes	5,940	8,490	10,825	14,570
Undiagnosed diabetes	2,540	5,010	5,330	5,420
Total with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed)	8,480	13,500	16,155	19,990
Complications:				
Visual impairment	1,250	1,520	1,900	2,480
Renal failure	30	32	38	46
Leg amputations	41	40	43	50
Annual deaths attributable to diabetes	170	180	210	235

2010 US Virgin Islands Diabetes Statistics for Seniors (65 & older) and Minorities¹			
	Seniors	Blacks	Hispanics
Population	9,330	82,300	15,360
Pre-diabetes	4,660	20,960	3,900
Diagnosed diabetes	1,830	6,760	1,030
Undiagnosed diabetes	680	4,000	610
Total diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed)	2,510	10,760	1,640
Complications:			
Visual impairment	375	1,200	185
Renal failure	5	27	3
Leg amputations	6	33	5
Annual deaths attributable to diabetes	25	155	17

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.

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