

U.S. Virgin Islands’ Diabetes Crisis among Hispanics: Today and Future Trends

Diabetes is a very serious problem for U.S. Virgin Islanders of Hispanic origin. In 2010, about 1,640 of them had diabetes.¹ Almost 610 of them were undiagnosed¹ and possibly beginning to suffer from the common complications of diabetes, including eye, kidney, lower extremity, and heart damage.³

Type 2 diabetes is becoming a common disease for many adults, and it is even beginning to affect school-aged children. Virgin Islanders of Hispanic origin are much more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, suffer more kidney failures, and have a higher mortality rate than non-Hispanic whites.¹⁹

In 2010, another 3,900 Virgin Islanders of Hispanic origin 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 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%.¹⁴ However, if they do not take action, individuals with pre-diabetes can often progress to diabetes within 10 years.⁴ So if current trends continue, the number of Hispanic Virgin Islanders with diabetes is projected to increase to 2,540 by 2025.¹

Pre-Diabetes and Diabetes Trends¹ among Virgin Islanders of Hispanic Origin

Hispanic Virgin Islanders Diabetes Data and Forecasts	2010	2025
Population	15,360	15,680
Pre-diabetes	3,900	4,000
Diagnosed diabetes	1,030	1,850
Undiagnosed diabetes	610	690
Total with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed)	1,640	2,540
Complications:		
Visual impairment	185	315
Renal failure	3	5
Leg amputations	5	7
Annual deaths attributable to diabetes	17	23

We now understand more about delaying or even preventing the onset of diabetes as well as how to effectively treat it, which can result in a dramatic reduction in complications and premature death.^{12,13,14} 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.^{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 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.

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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