



**THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
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**Governor Bryan Closes Schools and Postpones Carnival  
As Part of Territory's Response to COVID-19 Virus**

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS—Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Monday announced that as part of efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID 19 in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Territory's schools, including the Department of Human Services Head Start Program, will be closed for at least three weeks, effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020.

Governor Bryan also said that remaining Carnival events on St. Thomas have been postponed indefinitely.

The Governor said during the Government House Weekly Press Briefing on Monday that he took these actions following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's update Sunday night of its interim guidance on mass gatherings.

"This new guidance recommends that for the next eight weeks, organizers, whether groups or individuals, cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States," Governor Bryan said.

Also speaking at Monday's briefing were Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen, Education Commissioner

Racquel Berry-Benjamin, Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte and Virgin Islands Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe.

To date, 21 residents have been tested for COVID-19, with three people testing negative and one person testing positive. The Department of Health is awaiting test results on an additional 8 PUIs and 9 more samples were sent off for testing on Monday.

Governor Bryan also asked businesses in the Territory take efforts to practice social distancing and not allow more than 50 persons at a time into their establishments, with the exception of some large grocery stores and other large stores.

The Governor also said his Administration currently is evaluating the implications of the CDC's guidance on inter-island ferry transportation. Governor Bryan urged residents not to ride the St. Thomas-St. John ferry unless it is absolutely necessary.

He also asked residents to sign up for push notifications about the coronavirus in the Territory by texting "COVID19USVI" to 888-777, and he asked younger residents to help their parents and grandparents to also sign up for the notifications.

"This global pandemic is ever-evolving. The situation is very fluid. We are using real-time information to make the decisions necessary to protect our community," Governor Bryan said. "I am urging us all to remain prudent and vigilant, not fearful. If we take the information and do what we need to do to protect ourselves and the people we love, this, too, will pass."

On Friday, the Governor declared a state of emergency in the Territory as part of his Administration's aggressive efforts to mitigate the threat of the COVID-19 epidemic.

"Our concerns are twofold," Governor Bryan said during a press conference Friday morning at Government House in Christiansted. "Our primary concern is our elderly population, as they are the most vulnerable to the effects of this virus. Secondly, we want to stay on the offense and constantly ahead of the disease by continually protecting the public from contracting the virus at all."

Governor Bryan also asked residents who suspect they may have contracted the virus not to go to the hospital and instead call 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519 and a health care worker will come to them.

The state of emergency, which went into effect immediately, triggers a number of provisions aimed at slowing and lessening the threat of the coronavirus:

- Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion has assumed authority of all regulation of all health care facilities in the Territory.
- DLCA Commissioner Richard Evangelista has activated a price freeze on all items in high demand as a direct result of COVID-19, and his agency is investigating complaints of price-gouging.
- Federal assistance, including access to more federal resources to minimize the impact of the virus on the community, has been expedited.
- There is a moratorium in place on permits for mass gatherings until further notice.

For more information on COVID-19, the new strain of coronavirus, please visit the USVI Department of Health's website, [doh.vi.gov/coronavirus](http://doh.vi.gov/coronavirus) or text COVID19USVI to 888777.

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