GOVERNMENT HOUSE
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 26, 2020
Press Contact
Richard Motta Jr.
340-474-2399
www.vi.gov
richard.mottajr@go.vi.gov

Administration Urges Continued COVID Cautions, Social Distancing for Upcoming Holiday Season

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During the Government House weekly COVID-19 press briefing on Monday, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta Jr. and Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s COVID-19 Task Force is closely monitoring the surge of cases on the mainland and urged continued caution as residents head into the upcoming holiday season.

According to Director Motta, there are 21 states that have seen their COVID-19 infection rates increase by 10% or more from last week and local officials are making changes to COVID-19 protocols in the Territory as necessary.

"We are working to improve our screening of incoming travelers and amend our existing protocols in a manner to allow some semblance of normalcy while keeping the residents in our community safe," he said.

Director Motta said the Territory has managed to keep the virus to a minimum in the community because of residents continued adherence to social distancing, wearing masks, washing their hands and using hand sanitizer.

While reporting the latest numbers related to COVID-19, Commissioner Encarnacion also gave specific advice to the public regarding Halloween parties and trick-or-treating.

"We are still in the midst of a pandemic, and we have to change the way we celebrate. You can still have a good time, but safety must come first," she said.

The Commissioner cited CDC guidelines and activities people should avoid because they have the most likelihood of spreading the virus:

- Door-to-door traditional trick-or-treating
- Trunk-or-treating events featuring groups of vehicles
- Indoor functions, like haunted houses and costume parties

"We've actually gotten word that several organizations have planned and organized events like these. We will be contacting you personally, not to stop the events but to better guide you to ensure safety," Commissioner Encarnacion said. "These events are usually crowded, and people may scream and spread particles in the air."

The Department of Health also is advising residents to wash their hands and wear masks if they are preparing and/or giving out treats and that a costume mask is not an appropriate substitute against COVID-19.

Commissioner Encarnacion also encouraged residents who are planning to host a Halloween gathering or party to contact the Department of Health for guidance planning the event.

Unemployment

- To date, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) has issued 44,015 unemployment insurance checks totaling more than $34,199,052.
- The department also has issued an additional 27,952 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation checks totaling $43,058,280.
- VIDOL has issued 3,638 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance checks to self-employed Virgin Islanders totaling $6,265,014 and $2,007,702 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.
- In total, the Bryan-Roach Administration has issued 76,685 checks totaling $85,530,048.

Stimulus

The Bureau of Internal Revenue has extended the deadline to file a 2018 income tax return or form 1040 to receive a stimulus check to November 21. The Bureau will continue to make payments until December 31, 2020.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 22 active cases
- 23,643 individuals tested to date (more than 20% of the population)
- 22,269 of those tests were negative
- 1,348 tests came back positive
- 1,305 people have recovered
- 21 fatalities to date
- No COVID-19 patients are hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- Two COVID-19 patients, one of whom is on a ventilator, are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

###