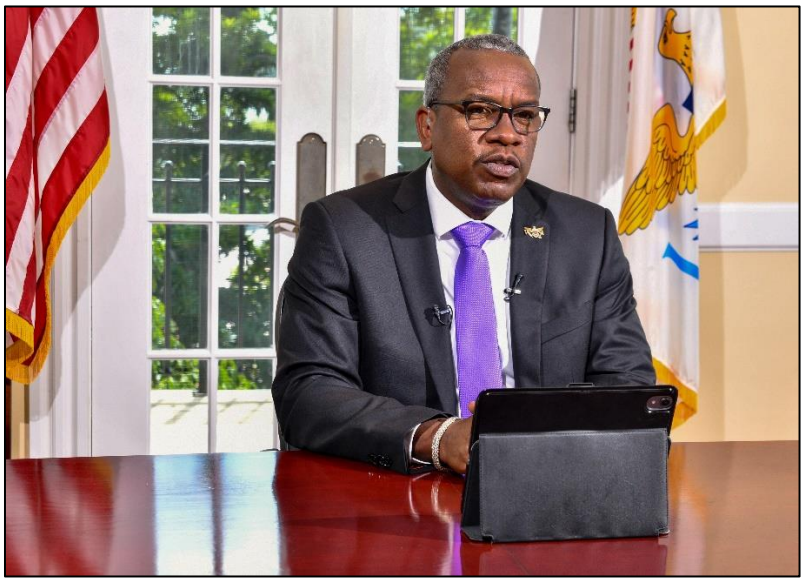
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Governor Bryan Closes Nightclubs, Bars to Close After Christmas As COVID-19 Cases Continue to Spike Across the Territory

USVI Will Receive Pfizer Vaccine This Week and Moderna Vaccine Expected Next Week;Vaccine Deliveries to the Territory Will Continue Through December

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Monday said he is closing nightclubs – beginning at 5 p.m. Thursday, December 17 – in an effort to mitigate the continued spike of COVID-19 cases in the Territory and across the mainland U.S.

Governor Bryan also said that all bars are to close from Christmas Day until at least January 8 – at which time the Department of Health will reassess the threat of the virus spreading – and that he is stepping up enforcement on property owners who allow their properties to be used for parties in violation of COVID-19 protocols.

“Our neighbors in Puerto Rico and the BVI imposed curfews in attempts to curtail the spread of the virus. The USVI COVID Task Force has begun discussions on the implementation of a curfew to curtail nighttime gatherings,” Governor Bryan said. “I want everyone within the sound of my voice to know that I am perhaps the one person standing between you and a curfew here in the Territory.

"So, I am appealing to you, please stop trying to make sense out of nonsense and wear your mask and do the things that you need to do," the Governor said.

Governor Bryan said he plans to publicly receive the vaccine to demonstrate its safety and to encourage all residents to get vaccinated.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion provided details of the vaccine rollout in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with the Pfizer vaccine set to arrive this week in the Territory and the Moderna vaccine coming next week.

"A minimum of 975 doses are expected to be in the territory this week to start Phase 1A vaccinations, to include clinical healthcare staff and persons in long-term care facilities," Commissioner Encarnacion said. "Populations in Phases 1B through C comprise first responders, persons with immunocompromised conditions and the senior population as more vaccines are ordered and delivered on a weekly basis."

Last week the Department of Health worked with federal officials to test its distribution plan for dispersing the vaccines throughout the Territory, and next steps include continued healthcare provider training by federal and Pfizer vaccine officials, finalizing details of vaccination scheduling of targeted populations, confirming data reporting, and continued dissemination of public information.

Commissioner Encarnacion reiterated the importance of staying safe and keeping others safe during the holiday period, and she stressed that avoiding travel and gatherings is the safest approach.

"Many residents are traveling to the mainland to attend mass gatherings and are not following best practices for reducing the spread of COVID-19," the Commissioner said. "We are still strongly discouraging residents from non-essential travel as COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the U.S. mainland and locally. Travel increases your chance of getting COVID-19 especially in areas with a high positivity rate."

Unemployment

The Department of Labor has begun its seventh program of assistance for eligible beneficiaries with the start of the Lost Wages Assistance Program, which began on Monday. The program is federally funded through an application the Department of Labor submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and was approved in September.

After completing programming, testing and staff training, the Department of Labor has issued 1,549 checks totaling $1.3 million through the Lost Wages Assistance Program.

- Last week, the Department of Labor received 70 more applications for unemployment assistance, bringing the total number of applications to 17,520 since the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As of December 13, the department of Labor has processed 16,756 of those applications for a completion rate of 96%.
- To date, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) has issued 47,917 unemployment insurance checks totaling more than $38,057,917.
- The department also has issued an additional 28,542 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation checks totaling $45,432,860.
- VIDOL has issued 5,471 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance checks to self-employed Virgin Islanders totaling $8,982,478 and $3,569,355 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.
- In total, the Bryan-Roach Administration has issued 5,671 checks totaling $97,443,200 since March.

COVID-19 cases

- 1,746 people were test for COVID-19 since Monday, December 7. Of those tested during that period, 158 people tested positive (9% positivity rate – up 2% since December 7).
- The Territory's overall positivity rate is 6%.
- Currently tracking 179 active cases
- 31,500 individuals tested to date (almost 30% of the population)
- 29,572 of those tests were negative
- 1,807 tests came back positive
- 1,605 people have recovered
- 23 fatalities to date
- Two COVID-19 patients are hospitalized, with one on a ventilator, at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- No COVID-19 patients are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

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