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Health Department Gives Details on Distribution Drill For Arrival of Future COVID-19 Vaccine

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During the Government House weekly press briefing on Monday, Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis provided some details on the distribution drill the Department of Health is conducting this week in advance of the expected arrival of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Using a "mock" vaccine, the Department of Health drill involves testing the ordering, delivery and reporting of receipt of the Pfizer vaccine in the Territory during the first of three phases, according to Dr. Ellis.

"Specific to the Territory is the redistribution of the vaccine from facilities with ultra-cold refrigeration to providers who will administer the vaccine," Dr. Ellis said. "Two facilities with ultra-cold refrigeration units on St. Croix and St. Thomas will act as 'hubs,' or places where the vaccine will be stored. Six of the 15 healthcare providers who signed up to participate in the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Program will be 'spokes' in the drill where persons would be able to receive the vaccine."

The Department of Health has collaborated with federal and local partners, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency and the Virgin Islands National Guard to carry our the "hub and spokes" logistical approach.

When the Territory receives the actual vaccine, populations deemed critical will be vaccinated during the first phase and include clinical staff, first responders, persons with immunocompromised conditions and those in long-term care facilities," Dr. Ellis said.

The subsequent phases will include the elderly, behavioral health patients – specifically the chronically homeless – and incarcerated persons, with the vaccine expected to be available to the wider general population in the Spring 2021, she said.

Boating and masks

During the briefing, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta Jr. said Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s COVID-19 Task Force is re-evaluating the guidelines regarding boaters and the requirements for masking while they are at sea.

"The task force is re-examining the policy to determine whether adjustments at this time are warranted," Director Motta said. "Bear in mind that everything we do is ultimately for the protection of the public health of Virgin Islands residents. Our regulations are already considerably less stringent than other boating destinations in the Caribbean."

Unemployment

- As of Monday morning, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) has issued 47,375 unemployment insurance checks totaling more than $37,521,212.
- Since the last update, VIDOL has received 307 new applications for unemployment benefits for a total of 17,259 applications. As of Sunday, November 29, VIDOL has processed 16,307, or 94%, of those applications.
- The department also has issued an additional 28,338 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation checks totaling $44,421,900.
- VIDOL has issued 5,036 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance checks to self-employed Virgin Islanders totaling $8,215,938 and $2,995,079 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.
- In total, the Bryan-Roach Administration has issued 82,550 checks totaling $93,154,129.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 55 active cases
- 28,398 individuals tested to date
- 26,783 of those tests were negative
- 1,544 tests came back positive
- 1,466 people have recovered
- 23 fatalities to date
- One COVID-19 patient is hospitalized and on a ventilator at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix
- One COVID-19 patient is hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas

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