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Governor Bryan Increases Enforcement for Restaurants, Boaters and Approves Fines for People Not Wearing Masks

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – During his weekly briefing on Monday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. issued new mandates in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the Territory, including limiting funerals to groups of 10, closure of restaurants that don't comply with the executive orders, confiscating of boats that engage in "rafting" or tying up together and fines for those caught not wearing a mask in places where it is required.

The Governor also reiterated the point that of the three groups of COVID-19 cases, travelers comprise the fewest number of positive infections with 69, while community spread accounts for 145 cases and 268 are attributed to close contact with someone who was positive for the virus.

"In this pandemic, we cannot afford to go on hunches. We must let the data be the guide," Governor Bryan said. "Following the data, we know that our main vulnerability for the spread of this virus is at social events occurring in our community where individuals are not adhering to the guidelines issued by the CDC and the Department of Health."

To curb the spread of the virus in the Territory, Governor Bryan instituted new mandates.

Funerals

All funerals or memorials are limited to immediate family members only and no more than 10 family members at any one time.

Restaurants

Restaurants have been put on notice that Enforcement Officers will be strictly enforcing all applicable guidelines to operations of restaurants during COVID-19. Any violators will be subject to closure for 30 days and imposition of an administrative fine by the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

Boaters

There shall be no “rafting” (boats tying up together) in any bays or anchorages of the Territory and all vessels must be 12 feet apart at all times, except in the case of a medical emergency. Also, no vessels are allowed to anchor in any designated swimming area. Violations of these boating restrictions can result in a fine of up to \$10,000 per incident and possible seizure by the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Masking

Individuals found to be in violation of the masking order will be subject to a fine of \$50 for the first offense and \$100 for each additional offense.

Governor Bryan said the COVID-19 spread currently is worst in the St. Thomas-St. John District, where there are almost 100 active cases on St. Thomas alone. Unlike on St. Croix, where it was possible to trace the nexus of the virus spread at the Limetree Bay facility, Department of Health officials are unable to determine a “ground zero,” and the place where the spread is occurring is not at all obvious, the Governor said.

“We cannot continue to have a policy where all the innocent suffer for the few guilty. We will be enforcing these mandates beginning today, and we will be unforgiving,” Governor Bryan said. “No exceptions. We will fine you, confiscate your boat and close your business if we must. This pandemic is not going away any time soon, and we must adapt to life around it.”

Unemployment

- To date, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor has issued 28,448 unemployment checks totaling \$21,453,946.
- The Department of Labor also has issued an additional 23,647 federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) totaling \$36,369,000.
- The department has begun the distribution of unemployment compensation for self-employed individuals, independent contractors and other workers who ordinarily are ineligible for unemployment and has issued 15 PUA checks totaling \$34,518.
- The Department of Labor COVID-19 hotline is 1-877-374-0356.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 128 active cases
- 10,905 individuals tested to date (more than 10% of the population)
- 10,357 of those tests were negative

- 547 tests came back positive
- 410 people recovered
- 8 fatalities to date
- Two COVID-19 patients are hospitalized, with one on a ventilator, at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- Six COVID-19 patients, with two on a ventilator, are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

Governor Bryan's next update is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Monday, August 17.

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