

Rush transcript of Governor Bryan's April 29, 2020 COVID-19 Update

Good Day,

Today we are currently tracking 7 active cases of COVID. So far, we have tested 872 individuals for COVID-19 in the territory. 732 of those tests came back negative, 62 positive, and we have had 4 fatalities. As of this morning, we have 78 tests pending.

There are 3 COVID-19 patients hospitalized at the JFL hospital none of them are on ventilators. There are no COVID patients at Schneider Regional Medical Center. I want to urge the public to pay less attention to the total number of cases and more attention to the active cases at this time. We have had 62 positive cases in the territory, but we only have 7 active cases, 3 of which are in the hospital, and none of them are vented. Moving forward, we will see an increase in cases, but what we have to manage is the number of cases that are in our healthcare system.

If you are experiencing symptoms of fever, shortness of breath, dry cough, or fatigues, especially if you have recently traveled into the territory or been around someone who may have, please call the Department of Health hotline numbers. Those numbers are 340-712-6299 for St. Croix residents and 340-776-1519 for residents in the St. Thomas/ St. John District.

We continue to process applications and checks as quickly as possible. We are happy to report that we are making good progress with the extra help and yesterday we processed out 164 checks bringing us to a cumulative 2,012 checks and \$1,412,217

As you are aware, the current stay at home order expires on April 30th. Our intention is to begin reopening the local economy in preparation for eventually returning access to the outside world. Governors across the country are grappling with the manner in which we reopen business. Here in the VI are going to take a balanced step forward. It is our first peek out the door to the new normal.

We have created a 5-tier alert system to manage our transition. Those tiers are red, orange, yellow, blue, and green.

Red is the most extreme alert, which is triggered by mass community spread and is referred to as "**Total Quarantine**" and requires a variable curfew. Orange is the current state that we consider ourselves in, which is governed by the current "**Stay at Home Order**." Effective Monday, we will be moving to the Yellow alert, which will be referred to as "**Safer at Home**." The other two remaining colors are blue, which we refer to as "**Open Doors**," where we will allow hotels and guest houses to resume booking leisure guests, and restaurants will be open for seating. The green alert represents what will be our "**New Normal**" of sustained vigilance.

The Safer at Home Order that we are executing today becomes effective Monday, May 4th, it relaxes some of the restrictions on non-essential business. The order also extends the Stay at Home Order until Monday morning at 6 AM. To be clear, the current order to stay at home order remains in effect until Monday.

The most significant change in our status requires all individuals that patronize commercial establishments to wear a facial covering before entering. No masks, no service. Furthermore, any gatherings of people require a facial covering. The only exceptions to the rules are children under two years of age or anyone with acute respiratory issues.

I am asking that we all be mature and lookout for the best interest of ourselves and our loved ones.

Recreational facilities such as gymnasiums, tennis courts, and golf courses are allowed to reopen as long as physical distancing and group limits and group limits are. Contact sports such as basketball, volleyball, and football are strictly prohibited. Equipment must be properly sanitized and not shared.

Bowling alleys and movie theaters are allowed to reopen but are prohibited from selling food and beverages or hosting parties. Private offices currently closed are allowed to reopen, but they should encourage all employees that are not critical to in-person operations or classified as essential should be allowed to continue working from home or remotely.

Government operations will remain in its current hold pattern with non-essential employees remaining at home and as many essential people working from home as possible. All conditions laid out for public interaction remains in place until otherwise notified.

Private healthcare facilities are allowed to resume procedures if the facilities are following required safety protocols.

Personal services, such as barbershops hair salons, massage therapists are permitted to operate by appointment only. They must employ strict hygiene guidelines and frequent sanitation procedures for all contact services and tools. These include hand sanitizer for all patrons entering the store and masks in place for the entire time of visit where permissible. No more than 5 customers will be allowed to wait at any given time, and no more than 10 people, including employees, will be allowed in the establishment at any time. Additional guidelines for these types of services will be provided by the Department of Health.

Retail stores will not be allowed to allow more than 10 individuals into the establishment at any given time. The only exemptions to this requirement are grocery stores and the previously exempted big box stores.

Visitation to nursing homes is still prohibited. Childcare facilities are still closed subject to guidance provided by the Department of Human Services.

All schools remain closed, public-private, and parochial. Restaurants continue to be restricted to take out, delivery, or drive-through service.

Bars remain closed. Churches are allowed to conduct service, providing they do not exceed a capacity of 50 individuals and that everyone, including the pastor, wears a facial covering. We encourage churches to continue virtual services to the greatest extent possible.

Generally, we continue to strictly enforce the social distancing mandate of 6 ft of separation between customers when not directly conducting service.

Employers should encourage frequent breaks to wash hands and should require employees to stay home when showing any signs or symptoms of sickness. They should require facial covering or masks during customer interactions and whenever possible, during work activities. Again, we encourage all employees, not critical to operations, to continue working from home.

We anticipate moving from this yellow stay at home status to the blue open-door status on June 1st. That is the date marked tentatively for the reopening of USVI to leisure travelers.

We are encouraging vulnerable individuals to stay at home to the greatest extent possible. You are safer at home. For the purposes of this Executive Order, vulnerable individuals are individuals who are 65 years and older, individuals with chronic lung disease or severe asthma, individuals with serious heart conditions, individuals who are immunocompromised and pregnant women.

But I want to remind the general public that as we have loosened some of the restrictions, you too are safer at home.

We have been successful in securing the commitment of a \$60 million line of credit to help with our government operations.

We have secured \$75 million as part of the CARES act, and it is deposited in our account.

We have applied a \$250 credit to every residential WAPA account and \$500 credit to all commercial accounts.

\$84.7 million in advance payments on your stimulus checks.

The US treasury has everything required from us as of April 2nd. All US territories are in the same situation. Neither PR nor any US territory, have received either the procedures nor the funds to distribute stimulus funds. The check roll is ready to go, all we are waiting for Treasury to give us the green light as soon as we get it, you will get your check.

I have here today the Commissioner Encarnacion of the Department of Health to answer any questions.

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