

Rush Transcript of Governor Bryan's  
May 4, 2020 COVID-19 Update

Good Day,

Today we are currently tracking 11 active cases of COVID. So far, we have tested 1,046 individuals for COVID-19 in the territory. 965 of those tests came back negative, 66 positive, and we have had 4 fatalities. As of this morning, we have 15 tests pending.

There are 3 COVID-19 patients hospitalized at the JFL hospital one of them is on a ventilator. The good news is that we expect to discharge one of those individuals later today. There are no COVID patients at Schneider Regional Medical Center.

Those of you that follow our numbers closely will recognize that since last Thursday, we have tested 130 individuals, which yielded 130 negatives. That's a 0% positive rate. This high level of testing was an aggressive contact tracing effort in response to a small surge on St. Croix, proving two things 1) surges can occur even when we have a stay at home order 2) we can deploy resources rapidly to isolate individuals that may be affected.

This weekend we also passed another COVID landmark and can now say that we have tested approximately 1% of our total population.

Today begins our new Safer at Home order, in which we are allowing certain non-essential businesses to resume operations as long as they adhere to the safety guideline issued by the CDC and our local Department of Health. These non-essential businesses include barbers and hair salons, massage therapists, gymnasiums, and private healthcare facilities for elective medical visits.

I've heard a lot of concerns and anxiety regarding the reopening of leisure businesses such as movie theaters and bowling alleys. Our team always had the same level of concern regarding those types of businesses and anticipated that they would not open without being able to serve food and drink.

However, to gain further information, last week, we approached the management to see how they'd be able to operate within the social of distancing guidelines of this pandemic. Caribbean Cinemas has notified us that they are developing their protocol and do not anticipate opening before June 1st. Tropical Ten pins the sole bowling, has indicated that they are unable to reopen at this time and will continue to work with them to develop protocols that keep the public safe. Within our executive order, we also called for all gaming centers and casinos to be closed.

Any resident who wishes to patronize any establishment must wear a facial covering to protect themselves and others. Every one of these establishments must provide for safe physical and social distancing and ensure proper sanitization of all equipment. We also want to make it clear that ski masks are prohibited both indoors and outdoors as a means of addressing the need for a mask in commercial establishments. We did not mention it before, but taxis, safaris, and cars for hire are considered commercial establishments, and all occupants must be masked.

In addition, our new Safer at Home order call for residents to wear facial coverings when entering all establishments except for children under the age of two or individuals with acute respiratory issues. We also made an accommodation so that religious leaders can give the sermon without a mask, provided they always stay 10ft away from the congregation.

We have printed “No Mask, No Service” signs for businesses, they are available at the property and procurement office, and DLCA offices in St. Thomas and will be available tomorrow on St. Croix. While these new guidelines will be strictly enforced, I am asking the public’s assistance by reporting any violators. You can do so by calling the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs at 340-713-3522 on St. Croix and 340-714-3522 on St. Thomas.

As we enter this new phase in our path to a new normal, we must also protect the economic well-being of Virgin Islands families. Rest assured, we will continue to do everything to protect the public health and well-being of every Virgin Islander.

We continue to make good progress and have processed out 2430 checks bringing us to a cumulative \$1.7 million.

I have some good news and some bad news regarding the release of stimulus payment to the Virgin Islands. I received word this morning that the IRS has approved our Economic Impact Payment Plan, which clears the way to receiving the funds in our treasury. With this approval, we expect the first round of checks to be issued by sometime next week.

The bad news is we are still having challenges with the Social Security Administration with regards to the issuance of stimulus checks directly to recipients in the Virgin Islands. We do not have a final decision as yet, but we are advising all social security recipients at this time to file a 1040. If you have any questions, contact the Bureau of Internal Revenue at 340-773-1040.

More good news, a part of the CARES Act has been made available to children who participate in the school lunch program extra food benefits. These food benefits are referred to as Pandemic EBT or P-EBT and should be around \$300 per child.

Families will receive a P-EBT card for each eligible child in the household to be used on food and groceries. Commissioner of Human Services, Kimberly Causey- Gomez is here and can provide further information and answer any questions you may have.

Please remember that this virus is not going anywhere, but rather it’s about learning how we live with it until, at some point, a vaccine or an effective treatment is available. This foundation that we are laying in our phased approach to reopening is just that, a foundation. A firm foundation upon which to build pandemic policy as we go down this strange new road. There isn’t an “on,” or “off” switch or magic button that we can push that will make it all perfect. We simply must trust our experts and that we are making our decisions on the best information we can get.

I also want to remind the public that if you or someone you know are experiencing symptoms of fever, shortness of breath, dry cough, chills or new loss of taste and smell; especially if you have recently traveled into the territory or been around someone who has, please call the DOH Hotline numbers. The quicker we diagnose people, the quicker the tracing, the less.

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