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Press Contact

Richard Motta Jr.

340-474-2399

www.vi.gov

richard.mottajr@go.vi.gov



Virgin Islanders Can Now Schedule Vaccinations Online Through the Department of Health Website

*Vaccine Available for All Residents, Community Vaccination Centers
Scheduling Appointments for Virgin Islanders 16 and Older*

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During Monday’s Government House weekly press briefing, Virgin Islands Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion announced that residents can fill out the required paperwork and schedule an appointment to get vaccinated at the Department of Health website at www.covid19usvi.com/vaccine.

All Virgin islanders ages 16 or older are now eligible to receive the vaccine, and resident without access to the Internet can still book appointments at one of the Community Vaccination Centers by calling the VITEMA hotline at 340-777-VACS (8227).

“We have accommodations on-site on both islands for seniors and persons with disabilities. This includes parking and a short walk to the designated entry area,” Government House Communications Director Richard Motta Jr. said during the weekly briefing. “We also have options for ASL interpreting and a special waiting area for you before and after your vacation is completed.”

There is a Community Vaccination Center in each district:

- At the University of the Virgin Islands Great Hall on St. Croix.
- At UVI’s Sports and Fitness Center on St. Thomas.

After the first week of the Community Vaccination centers taking appointments, almost 25,000 persons have been vaccinated in the Territory as of March 7:

- 1st dose – 16,929 administered
- 2nd dose – 7,959 administered
- Total – 24,888 doses administered

Commissioner Encarnacion also reminded residents who get vaccinated to download the free V-Safe app, which uses text messaging and web surveys to provide personalized health check-ins. The information gathered through the app also provides vital data to the CDC to track the progress of vaccinations in the United States and in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Anyone who thinks they may have contracted COVID-19 can call the Epidemiology hotline at 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519. For more information, visit covid19usvi.com.

For information about the COVID-19 vaccines, call the VITEMA hotline Mondays-Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 340-777-VACS (8227).

Eased restrictions

Monday also marked the start of some of the restrictions Governor Albert Bryan Jr. put in place as part of the State of Emergency he declared to mitigate the Covid-19 pandemic.

The easement of those restrictions that began Monday are:

- Restaurants can seat up to 75 percent of their allowable capacity, and they can seat parties larger than six persons.
- Taxis can transport more than the 50 percent restriction if all of the passengers are of the same party or group.
- Beaches will remain open until 5 p.m. on weekends and holidays.

All masking and social distancing remain in effect.

“All other guidelines remain in effect; however, as we move forward with our vaccination strategy and toward herd immunity, Governor Bryan will consider easing those as well,” Director Motta said.

Stimulus checks

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) is issuing 7,000 more stimulus checks – totaling \$4.3 million – to residents this week.

To date, the BIR and the Department of Finance have issued 32,000 second-round stimulus payments. Of those, 26,000 were for those who filed regular income tax returns, and 6,700 went to Social Security recipients.

Residents who have not yet filed a 2019 income tax return have until Monday, March 15 to do so to be eligible for a stimulus payment. Residents who are not tax filers can file a 2019 form 1040 and annotate \$1 on the interest line of the form.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue also has established a hotline – 340-714-9325 – to assist in responding to the high volume of calls by residents with questions about the stimulus checks.

American Rescue Plan

Director Motta also spoke about the current “American Rescue Plan” that is going through Congress and that will provide another round of stimulus payments, as well as other much-needed federal assistance totaling \$1.9 trillion.

The Bryan-Roach Administration has been ceaselessly lobbying members of Congress, President Biden and other key federal government officials to ensure that the needs of the Territory are not overlooked, in the bigger national picture.

“In his most recent conversations with the Senators and senior Senate staffers shaping the American Rescue Plan Act, Governor Bryan has emphasized the importance of ensuring and equitable allocation of financial assistance and the need to address the ongoing loss of tourism revenues as we seek to rebuild,” Director Motta said.

“We are pleased to announce today that as a result of those lobbying efforts, the Senate version of the American Rescue Plan addresses the needs of the Territory in the ways we had hoped, including preserving an equitable share of revenues and including up-front payments to reimburse our Treasury for making tax payments to our citizens,” he said.

Help for small businesses

Also at Monday’s press briefing, Wayne Huddleston, U.S. Small Business Administration Senior Area Manager in the Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands District Office, spoke about programs – including the Paycheck Protection Program – being offered to provide relief to small businesses suffering from the economic impact of COVID-19.

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) is a forgivable loan program that keeps workers on payroll and connected to their benefits, and loan proceeds can be used for eligible payroll costs and non-payroll costs, such as commercial rent, utilities, mortgage interest and COVID-19 worker protection costs.

“The PPP has made a difference in the Virgins Islands. Since the program began last year, over 2,360 small businesses have been approved for over \$158.2 million here in the Virgin Islands,” Mr. Huddleston said. “ This relief to hard-hit small businesses has allowed them to rehire and retain workers, safely reopen and deliver the essential goods and services that our community depends on.”

Only three weeks remain before the PPP closes per the Economic Aid Act that passed Congress, and businesses can contact any of the five largest lenders in the Territory to get more information or apply.

Pop-Up testing sites

This week, pop-up testing sites will be at the following locations:

- **Home Depot** on St. Thomas on Tuesday, March 9, from 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Canegata Rec Center** on St. Croix on Tuesday, March 9, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- **The V.I. Port Authority Gravel Yard** on St. John on Wednesday, March 10, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.
- **Buddhoe Park** on St. Croix on Thursday, March 11, from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- **Lionel Roberts Stadium** on St. Thomas on Thursday, March 11, from 1 to 3 p.m.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 136 active cases.
- 49,337 individuals tested to date.
- 46,600 of those tests were negative.

- 2,735 tests came back positive.
- 2,574 people have recovered.
- 25 fatalities.
- Three COVID-19 patients currently are hospitalized, with one patient on a ventilator, at Juan F. Luis Medical Center on St. Croix.
- No COVID-19 patients are currently hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

The Bryan/Roach Administration continues to be committed to transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in government and ensuring that the disaster recovery is completed as quickly as possible.

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