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## USVI Set to Receive First Batch of Updated Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech Covid Vaccines

Coronavirus / **Published On September 21, 2023 06:21 AM /**

Staff Consortium **September 21, 2023**

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The V.I. Department of Health announced Wednesday that the territory is poised to welcome its first shipment of the revamped Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech Covid vaccines by the week's end.

This advancement comes on the heels of last week's endorsement by the Center for Disease Control and the accompanying approval from the Food & Drug Administration for the modified Covid vaccine. This new formulation is engineered specifically to counteract the XBB.1.5 variant and will be the exclusive Covid vaccine on offer throughout the upcoming fall season.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion stated, "The new vaccine will be available to everyone aged six months and upwards. We especially encourage those with a heightened susceptibility to severe symptoms to prioritize getting the updated vaccine as soon as possible." She further

clarified that the vaccine will be dispensed strictly by appointment, which "enables us to timely replenish the updated COVID vaccine stock."

Those eager to book an appointment can navigate to <https://www.covid19.usvi.care/> or dial the Health Hotline at (340) 712-6299 for St. Croix or 340-776-1519 for St. Thomas-St. John. The hotline operates from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

"For those yet to get a COVID jab, this moment presents the perfect opportunity to do so," Ms. Encarnacion added. She reinforced the efficacy of the vaccination, highlighting its robust defense against severe health implications, hospitalizations, and fatalities resulting from the virus. She pointed out that a single dose of the updated vaccine would render individuals current with their Covid vaccination schedule.

Guidance from the CDC stipulates that individuals who have recently been diagnosed with the Covid virus should defer their updated vaccine by three months. In a similar vein, those who have completed their original Covid-19 vaccine course should hold off for a minimum of two months before contemplating the new vaccine.

Furthermore, the VI Department of Health has issued a reminder to the public that it's permissible to receive both the flu shot and the Covid vaccine concurrently.

On the topic of vaccine cost and accessibility, the updated Covid vaccine is provided free of charge to the lion's share of Americans, courtesy of private health insurance and Medicare. Those without insurance or with inadequate coverage can avail themselves of free Covid vaccines at community health centers, pharmacies, and healthcare establishments, in line with the CDC's Bridge Access Program.

The Bridge Access Program, conceived specifically for Covid-19 vaccines, aspires to guarantee that adults with insufficient or no insurance retain access to complimentary Covid-19 vaccinations. This interim program is projected to wrap up in December 2024.