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Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte Provides Covid-19 Update for USVI Visitors, Responds to Surge in Coronavirus Cases

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Department of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte on Sunday reminded Virgin Islanders and visitors to the territory to continue complying with public health guidance to mitigate the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

According to the D.O.T. release, responding to international reports concerning a spike in cases in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Mr. Boschulte said while there were changes in the total number of positive cases (from 74 to 111) over the past two weeks, the 50 percent increase can be attributed mainly to incoming contractors at the refinery on St. Croix.

He reminded travelers that the territory is in its precautionary “Open Doors” phase of restarting its tourism-based economy, and encouraged everyone flying into the USVI to review the travel advisory on www.usviupdate.com and familiarize themselves with the toolkit for travelers.

“COVID-19 hotspots across the United States continue to emerge, and we have strict measures in place to mitigate the spread of the disease, such as health screenings at our airports and the wearing of masks when out in public or entering any business in the USVI,” Mr. Boschulte said.

The commissioner reiterated his confidence in the Department of Health’s handling of the public health response, indicating that the number of patients who tested positive increased from 2.86% on June 19 to 3.49% on July 3, according to the D.O.T. release.

The tourism chief noted that relative changes to small numbers can appear to be more significant than they really are. “If we have one case today, and three tomorrow, that’s a 200 percent increase,” said Commissioner Boschulte, while acknowledging that every additional COVID-19 case was cause for concern.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. announced last week that the strict protocols already in place at the oil refinery, including temperature scans at the gate, mandatory facial coverings, weekly reporting of contractors traveling to St. Croix, and the screening and quarantining of all contractors immediately upon arrival, will continue. However, with the evolving situation on the U.S. mainland, all contract workers must now be tested before arriving on St. Croix, and will not be allowed to travel if results are positive. Additionally, refinery workers with accommodations in a nearby residential community have been ordered not to leave the facility except for work duties.

The release said government officials are currently contemplating further restrictions on travel related to the COVID-19 surge in the continental United States, but Mr. Boschulte assured travelers en route to the U.S. Virgin Islands over the next few days that there is currently no official policy change in effect regarding COVID-19 testing for visitors arriving in the Territory, and as such, a negative PCR test is currently not required before travels.

During his coronavirus response update press briefing Thursday afternoon, Mr. Bryan said travelers coming into the territory will need to produce a negative coronavirus result from a test performed within the last 72 hours. If visitors fail to perform a test within the last 72 hours before arriving to the USVI, they will be given the option to be tested locally, or face a mandatory 14-day quarantine. The governor said a list of states on which the restrictions apply was being organized. “Most definitely Texas is one of them, and Florida, as they are certainly starting to spike at this point,” Mr. Bryan said.

According to D.O.T., routine temperature checks and health screenings are being conducted at ports of entry. No quarantine is required if travelers are healthy. Testing, quarantine and isolation protocols are in place for suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 and also for contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Meanwhile, the sale of alcohol is prohibited at all establishments after 11 p.m., and all bars will be closed daily at midnight until further notice.