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USVI is Not 'Resting on Our Laurels' Relative to Covid-19 Response, Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte Says

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Joseph Boschulte, Dept. of Tourism Commissioner in the Bryan Administration By. USVI DEPT. OF TOURISM

Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte said Friday that while the global community learns to adapt to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), protecting lives and livelihoods while ensuring the territory's economic survival is the order of the day for the foreseeable future.

He said while there was a 5.6 percent increase in overall positive cases on Thursday (from 249 to 263), with increased testing, the territory saw less than 2 percent of all persons tested in the past 24 hours delivering a positive result.

On Friday, the Dept. of Health [reported 20 new cases in the USVI](#).

An encouraging sign is the low number of fatalities — 6 deaths total. Additionally, this number has remained unchanged for over two months.

"Throughout the course of this pandemic the U.S. Virgin Islands has been extremely vigilant in keeping our community and visitors informed about and engaged in our approach to mitigate the spread of COVID-19," Mr. Boschulte said.

"News stories that report high increases in positive cases since the return of leisure travel to the Territory fail to acknowledge that our policies and protocols have been extremely effective in managing the spread of the disease. In fact, health data reveals that the recent uptick in the number of positive cases is associated with business travel, which is being mitigated.

"But this does not mean that we rest on our laurels ... we are in this for the long haul," said the commissioner, who added that careful public health management and messaging is required to continue to mitigate the spread of the contagion, while also breathing much-needed life into a difficult economic environment.

Mr. Boschulte also noted that recent reports do not take into account the small size of the territory's population compared to U.S. states experiencing high percentage increases. "Relative changes to small numbers can appear to be more significant than they really are," he said, acknowledging that every additional COVID-19 case was cause for concern.

The tourism leader explained that about a third of the territory's positive cases were linked to contract workers at the oil refinery on St. Croix, where testing of the entire 3,000-strong workforce of employees and contractors is taking place consistently on a 14-day cycle. The refinery, already practicing strict screening measures, has redoubled its testing and isolation protocols, and is working closely with local government officials and the Department of Health to do more to mitigate spread of the virus.

The commissioner said with the uptick in cases across about a dozen U.S. "hotspot" states as well as strong airline load factors, he believes new testing requirements announced by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. will help protect the community, while achieving the delicate balance of injecting resources into the economy.

Effective July 15, 2020, any traveler 15 years old or over, whose home state has a COVID-19 positivity rate of greater than 10 percent will be required to produce a negative COVID-19 antigen (molecular/PCR/rapid) test result received within five days prior to travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands or a positive COVID-19 antibody test result received within four months prior to travel to the territory. Positivity rates are updated here: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/tracker/overview>

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The Bryan administration acknowledged that it struggled to strictly implement the changes on July 15, but said that efforts were underway to strengthen enforcement.

Routine temperature checks and health screenings are being conducted at ports of entry, D.O.T. said. 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.

The USVI is in a precautionary "Open Doors" phase of restarting its tourism-based economy. Travelers are encouraged to review the travel advisory on www.usviupdate.com and familiarize themselves with the Toolkit for Travelers.

