

With No Active Covid-19 Cases, BVI Relaxes Curfew, Allows Bars and Nightclubs to Reopen, Approves 'Warm Layups' for Cruise Ships

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Roadtown, Tortola, BVI. By ANGELA BURNS FOR VI CONSORTIUM

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS — British Virgin Islands Minister for Health and Social Development, Carvin Malone, updated the public on Wednesday on the British territory's continued efforts to fight the novel coronavirus, along with its plan to reopen borders as no new COVID-19 cases have been detected. In light of the territory's success on managing the virus, the curfew is being relaxed to allow for more economic activity.

Mr. Malone said as of Wednesday there were no active cases of the virus in the territory and that Cabinet decided to implement a new, more relaxed curfew order. The new order will be for a period of 14 days. It commenced on Thursday and will last until October 22. BVI plans to reopen its borders to visitors December 1. New curfew hours are from 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.

"Let me be candid, the fact that we have no positive cases on record today does not mean the BVI is Covid-free," Mr. Malone said. "Surveillance, screening, and testing services are conducted on a daily basis in an effort to detect and isolate any imported or locally acquired infections."

In his address, Mr. Malone further stated that the Social Distancing Task Force began full operations on October 5 and is comprised of 43 members. He said the task force will be operating within the Environmental Health Division. All members have been trained, equipped, commissioned, deployed, and legally empowered to educate, monitor, and enforce the public health measures alongside the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force. "These actions are taken to minimize the risk of transmission in the BVI," Mr. Malone said.

Under the new curfew order, Cabinet has decided to allow all businesses to reopen, among them bars and nightclubs, provided that those businesses pass an inspection guided by the Social Distancing Monitoring Protocols and are certified by the Environmental Health Division in order to operate. "Bars and nightclubs owners are currently in conversations with the department, and a date and time for inspections would be agreed," stated Mr. Malone.

The Cabinet has also decided to continue the restriction of vessels' movement in territorial waters, inclusive of the requirement that persons must be off the water by 6:00 p.m. Furthermore, the exclusion zone at the border area remains in place. Commercial ferries are permitted to operate up until curfew time.

Freight carriers and charter companies will also be allowed to travel between the BVI and USVI. For them to operate, carriers and companies are subject to established Covid-19 suppression measures and weekly Covid-19 analysis.

Additionally, Cabinet has permitted credential cruise ship companies to make technical calls of warm layups to the territory. Warm Layups, or hot layups as it is widely known, is when a cruise ship is docked at a port with a full crew on board maintaining the vessel, and is prepared for immediate regular service upon request. According to Carnival Corporation, a warm lay up costs \$2 million - \$3 million per vessel per month.

Cruise ships also must comply with the protocols established by the BVI Port Authority and sanctioned by the Health Emergency Operating Center.

Mr. Malone stated that Cabinet was scheduled to meet on Friday to finalize the protocols for further reopening measures.

Mr. Malone explained that between August 14 and September 8, the territory saw a cluster of 53 cases, which represented 75 percent of all detected cases. However, the last case that was detected during that period has now recovered. As of October 7th, the total number of individuals tested stood at 5,193 with zero active cases. The overall number of positive COVID-19 cases is documented at 71 people with one recorded death.

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