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Three Suspected Cases of Coronavirus Identified in the U.S. Virgin Islands: Specimens Being Sent to CDC for Testing

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Three Virgin Islanders are considered Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) of having contracted the rapidly spreading coronavirus.

The Department of Health made the disclosure in a written statement delivered to the media at 10 p.m. Monday — hours after a coordinated press conference in which there was no mention of the three individuals who are being tested for signs of coronavirus infection in nasal secretions, blood or other bodily fluids.

During the press briefing Monday afternoon, Gov. Albert Bryan and other government health officials sought to assure the Virgin Islands public that there was a low risk to the territory for

contracting the respiratory virus. Mr. Bryan, in [an hour-long interview](#) with the Consortium later in the day, further emphasized that the government is prepared to take dramatic steps to protect residents from the coronavirus, also known as COVID19, in the event the virus appears within the territory.

No executive, health or emergency management official, however, reported the cases under investigation.

It is unclear whether health officials learned of the new cases after taking to the cameras.

Government House Press Secretary Richard Motta said officials learned Monday afternoon that one possible case was being investigated on St. Croix. Mr. Motta told the Consortium on Tuesday that he was unaware of the additional two cases.

“None of these PUIs has been confirmed and all guidance is being followed to avoid potential transmission to others,” Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis said the press statement issued Monday night. Calls were placed to Dr. Ellis's work and mobile phone Tuesday evening, after her statement was reviewed. She could not be reached.

Mr. Motta said the public should not panic over the latest news. "It's important for people to understand these person under investigation doesn't mean that they have coronavirus. ...They are taking precautions, undergoing testing. They may or may not result in a confirmed cases."

The Dept. of Health offered no information about the suspected cases, to include providing no public information about which of the territory's islands the persons under investigation reside. "In accordance with the law and in order to protect patient's rights, no additional public health information on these or future PUIs will be provided," the statement said.

Suitable quarantine areas are being stood up at the Juan F. Luis and Schneider Regional hospitals, Mr. Bryan said, along with possible sites on VI National Guard grounds. "And we do have the ability to work with CDC to transport people to Puerto Rico" to be quarantined, the governor told the Consortium.

Ms. Ellis said that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently widened the patient testing criteria to include severe respiratory cases for persons who did not travel to affected areas in China and other locations. "It is also important to note that influenza activity is also at high levels and may present with similar symptoms" as coronavirus, she said.

According to the D.O.H. press statement, the department has shared CDC guidance and provided training to staff at the hospitals on St. Croix and St. Thomas, as well as in-person training to all clinics across the territory.

The Juan Luis Hospital issued a press release this week calling a "hoax" a series of messages circulating on WhatsApp that alleged that a confirmed case of coronavirus had been found at the hospital.