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Where is the Information? Bryan Administration Fails to Adequately Inform Public on Suspected Coronavirus Cases

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Governor Albert Bryan during an interview with the Consortium on Monday. By. CRUSELDA ROBERTS FOR VI CONSORTIUM

In almost every jurisdiction where suspected cases of the coronavirus are detected, governments take extraordinary steps to first inform their residents and announce steps to get ahead of a possible spread of the virus.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, however, the situation has been unfolding differently, with the information that the territory has three suspected cases, called Persons Under Investigation", or PUIs, being buried in a press release issued Monday night by the Dept. of Health, and zero

information on possible steps the department is taking in light of the suspected cases.

Governor Albert Bryan was interviewed by the Consortium at 6:00 p.m. Monday and never made mention of a single suspected case, even though his communications director, Richard Motta, told the publication Tuesday evening that the administration had learned of one suspected case on St. Croix Monday afternoon.

Some very basic questions can be answered by the Bryan Administration without violating privacy laws. For example:

- On which island do the patients reside?
- What level of isolation, if any, is in place for the potential spread of the virus?
- When did Government House become aware of the current Persons Under Investigation?
- Is there an effort to track down the individuals that those with symptoms of the pathogen may have come into contact with?

Whatever the Senate and current administration does — or does not — in connection with the coronavirus, look to our neighbors. When the government of the British Virgin Islands [learned of a suspected case in Tortola](#), officials called a hastily put-together press event to divulge steps BVI Premier Andrew Fahie had taken to allay the community's concerns. The BVI government quarantined the individual and tracked down five other persons that had been in contact with the person suspected to be ill so that they too could be tested.

On the U.S. mainland, in Europe, Asia and other regions where the deadly virus, known as COVID-19, spreads, the response carries the same pattern: make public confirmed or suspected cases and launch a massive dragnet to identify whom the sick or suspected individuals had come into contact with in an attempt to quell the pathogen's spread.

But in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where Governor Albert Bryan during an interview with the Consortium had initially downplayed the virus's impact and said the chances of it spreading in the territory was low, the administration as of early Wednesday had yet to give residents an update on pertinent information after the Dept. of Health placed in a press release issued 10:00 p.m. Monday, that there were three suspected cases in the territory, and that specimens were sent to the CDC for testing.

Before his interview with the Consortium Monday, the administration held a press briefing with health officials to talk about the virus, but the information made available in the press release issued at 10:00 p.m. Monday was not announced at the press event or at Mr. Bryan's interview with the Consortium four hours earlier. And even if the administration contends that it hadn't yet confirmed the suspected cases when the press briefing was held Monday afternoon or during Mr. Bryan's interview with the Consortium, an entire day — all of Tuesday — passed without any announcement from the administration on its actions in light of the suspected cases.

Virgin Islanders are very concerned — some fearful — of a potential outbreak in the USVI. They have been purchasing everything they believe could help protect them from the virus — from masks to hand sanitizers — in an attempt to shield themselves and their families.

An employee at Office Depot told the Consortium on Monday that the store ran out of lysol and hand sanitizers. Some residents have been visiting various outlets to find masks, only to learn that they have been sold-out.

Governments around the world have been scrambling to protect their citizens from the coronavirus. A major mark of this effort has been to provide the public with information about suspected and confirmed cases so they could better prepare themselves. Yet instead of being straightforward with this information, this administration has taken a more clandestine path. For example, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta told the Consortium Tuesday evening that officials learned Monday afternoon that one possible case was being investigated on St. Croix. Mr. Motta said he was unaware of the additional two cases.

Yet Mr. Bryan did not inform the public during [the Monday evening interview](#) with the Consortium of the suspected case on St. Croix, and if he knew of the other cases as mentioned in the D.O.H. release, he did not mention it either.

Now, residents are eager to know steps Mr. Bryan is taking to manage the matter. They want to know whether those persons have been quarantined, whether an effort is being waged to track the people that those suspected to have contracted the disease have been in contact with, and a breakdown of the islands where the the possible cases have been detected — just as the Dept. of Health did during [Zika](#) and [Chikungunya](#) days.