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## Bryan Limits Gatherings to 10 in Latest Coronavirus Action; 32 Suspected Cases Sent to CDC to Date, 3 Positives, 8 Negatives, 21 Pending

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Robert Moore **March 19, 2020**

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**A line dedicated to serving senior citizens at Plaza Extra East. By. YUSUF YUSUF**

As efforts to increase social distancing and slow the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) ramp up, Governor Albert Bryan on Thursday announced that a total of 32 suspected coronavirus cases — called Persons Under Investigation — had been sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for testing, with the territory receiving 11 test results so far: 3 turning up positive, 8 negative and 21 pending.

The third case, announced Wednesday, involves a resident of the St. Thomas-St. John district, who is currently quarantined at home and expected recover. The two others with confirmed

infections were described as quarantined and recovering, as well.

"All of these individuals are recovering well," Commissioner of Health Justa Encarnacion said.

Mr. Bryan said the Department of Health is being prudently selective, at the moment, about who is being screened and tested for the virus. "At this point we are testing the most likely people to have contracted the virus, either because they have traveled or we know that they have come in contact with persons who may have tested positive for the virus," Mr. Bryan said.

The V.I. Department of Health infectious disease staff is conducting "contact-tracing" to identify the individuals that have been in contact with people who test positive.

Mr. Bryan and the public health officials briefed the media on Thursday afternoon to bring the territory up to date on the latest measures underway to stem the spread of the highly infectious COVID-19.

### **Ban on Gatherings of 10 or More to be Enforced**

The V.I. government is banning all gatherings of more than 10 people in the territory.

Effective at 6 a.m. on Saturday, the ban on large in-person gatherings or events will be "strictly enforced," Gov. Bryan announced at the Thursday afternoon briefing at the University of the Virgin Islands.

"This decree also includes bars and restaurants [that] are now prohibited from seating more than 10 individuals at any one time," the governor said.

These more stringent limitations on public gatherings and local businesses reflect the mounting concerns about the COVID-19 spread across the Virgin Islands.

### **Big-Box Stores? and Exemptions**

The big-box stores such as Kmart, Home Depot, and the Plaza Extra and Pueblo supermarkets may be exempted because they are possibly able to maintain proper distancing of customers.

Gov. Bryan said all Plaza Extra stores have agreed to set-aside a "senior shopping" period, from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Monday. "We are asking that other individuals stay away from the grocery stores during those hours," he said.

Any business seeking an exemption from the 10-person limit should contact the Commissioner's Office at the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to discuss a waiver.

Funerals are exempted from the ban on congregations of 10 or more people. "We are asking that people, other than the immediate family, to refrain from attending these funerals until the crisis is over. We recommend that a memorial service be planned for some point after the state of emergency has been lifted."

### **Government Services**

Government offices will be restricted to essential services only, effective Monday, March 23rd, until April 6th, or until notice is provided. "This is much different than a hurricane, employees will be notified on who will be required to come to work, who will be required to simply work from home or who will be required to just stay home."

Those instructed to stay home will not lose any of their regular pay, Mr. Bryan said.

### **60-Day Extension on License Renewals**

There is a 60-day extension on all license renewals, including motor vehicle registration and business licenses and permits. Online government services will remain operational. Recipients of federal benefits — such as SNAP or Medicare — are encouraged to contact the respective federal agencies for guidance.

### **Drive Up Screenings**

On St. Thomas, individuals the VIDO H has determined should be tested for COVID-19 are being screened — nasal swabs are taken and sent to the CDC for actual coronavirus testing — at a drive-up screening site outside and at the far end of the Schneider Regional Medical Center parking lot, Ms. Encarnacion said.

The drive-up screening process provides for the least measure of exposure to the general public. The person being tested does not exit their vehicle. A public health staffer in full personal protective equipment swabs the patient's nasal passage. Instructions are given to the individuals by hand held signs. "Hold your ID against the window," for example.

Schneider hospital officials assured the public Thursday that the VIDO H screenings do not take place at or near the hospital entrance. Those being screened do not come in contact with hospital patients, staff or visitors.