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British Virgin Islands Records First Two Coronavirus Cases

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Tortola, British Virgin Islands - The British Virgin Islands has now officially confirmed its first two cases of COVID-19.

This was announced just after 2pm today by Premier Andrew Fahie, who was accompanied in presenting statements by his Health Minister Carvin Malone and the United Kingdom Governor Augustus Jaspert.

Premier Fahie said the patients have been notified.

One is a 56-year-old male resident who traveled from Europe into the Terrence B. Lettsome International Airport on Beef Island, BVI on March 15.

“Because of the symptoms he exhibited, the medical hotline was contacted, he was tested and have since been quarantined,” the BVI leader announced.

He said patient B is a 32-year-old male resident who also traveled into the BVI, this time from the United States. He reportedly came in contact with someone who had the virus on March 8 before arriving in the BVI on March 10. He is also in quarantine at his home.

“Both cases are unrelated,” the premier clarified.

Mr. Fahie said their samples were sent to the Caribbean Public Health Agency CARPHA in Trinidad and Tobago and the lab tests were confirmed today. He said the two patients and their close contacts were informed and are under mandatory quarantine.

“It is natural to feel a sense of fear, but rest assured all is being done to avoid the spread of virus,” Mr. Fahie told residents. “Follow all existing measures and others that will follow and let us continue to take every precautionary measure to stop the virus from spreading”.

He stated that his government is fully transparent, has been providing regular updates and will continue to do so.

“There is no need to feel ashamed or stigmatize anyone who gets tested,” he continued. “We are in this together and with God’s help, we will come out of this better than before.” He added that the BVI is far from a state of emergency, but urged everyone to be responsible for their actions.

Health Minister Carvin Malone reported on the readiness of the territory’s health system.

“The Health Emergency Operations Center HEOC has been working to ensure a comprehensive response to this pandemic,” he announced.

He summarized the BVI’s situation: 27 persons were tested for COVID-19, 25 tested negative and 2 returned as positive. There are 9 persons under investigation and awaiting results from Trinidad and Tobago, while 117 persons are on self quarantine, due to their level of risk.

Mr. Malone pointed out that testing, containment and quarantine are carried out in accordance with World Health Organization's technical guidelines.

“The Ministry has assessed its readiness to meet the demand, addressed the gaps regarding additional supplies and equipment and although we now have enough protective equipment for our personnel, we are purchasing additional supplies,” he stated.

He said the BVI has a storage of respiratory medicines, but this is also being addressed.

“There is no treatment for this virus, so prevention is critical,” the Health minister said.

“Government is urging the public to adhere to these measures which are key to reducing spread of virus. Frequently clean hands, when coughing and sneezing cover mouth with your elbow or tissue and throw away the tissue and wash your hands, avoid anyone with a fever or cough and resist the habit of touching your face.”

He told residents if they’ve recently traveled and are experiencing fever, shortness of breath, fatigue or cough, stay at home and contact the medical hotline 852 7650 or for any other concerns 468 2274.

Meantime, United Kingdom Governor Augustus Jaspert said he understands that the announcement will be of great concern to everyone, but it was not unexpected.

“We have seen the cases increasing in the region and we have put measures in place,” he said. “I would appeal to the public to remain calm, as Cabinet has put measures in place aimed at protecting everyone, putting safety first.”

He said that’s why the ports are closed, there’s a restriction on the number of persons who can gather in a group and businesses have been mandated to close early.

Governor Jaspert said the people of the British Virgin Islands are capable of working together, as seen following the devastating hurricanes of 2017. He acknowledged however that this is a different case with COVID-19 as no one knows how long it will last.

He spoke to food security, indicating that there is no indication that the food chains will be affected. But he encouraged everyone to be responsible.