

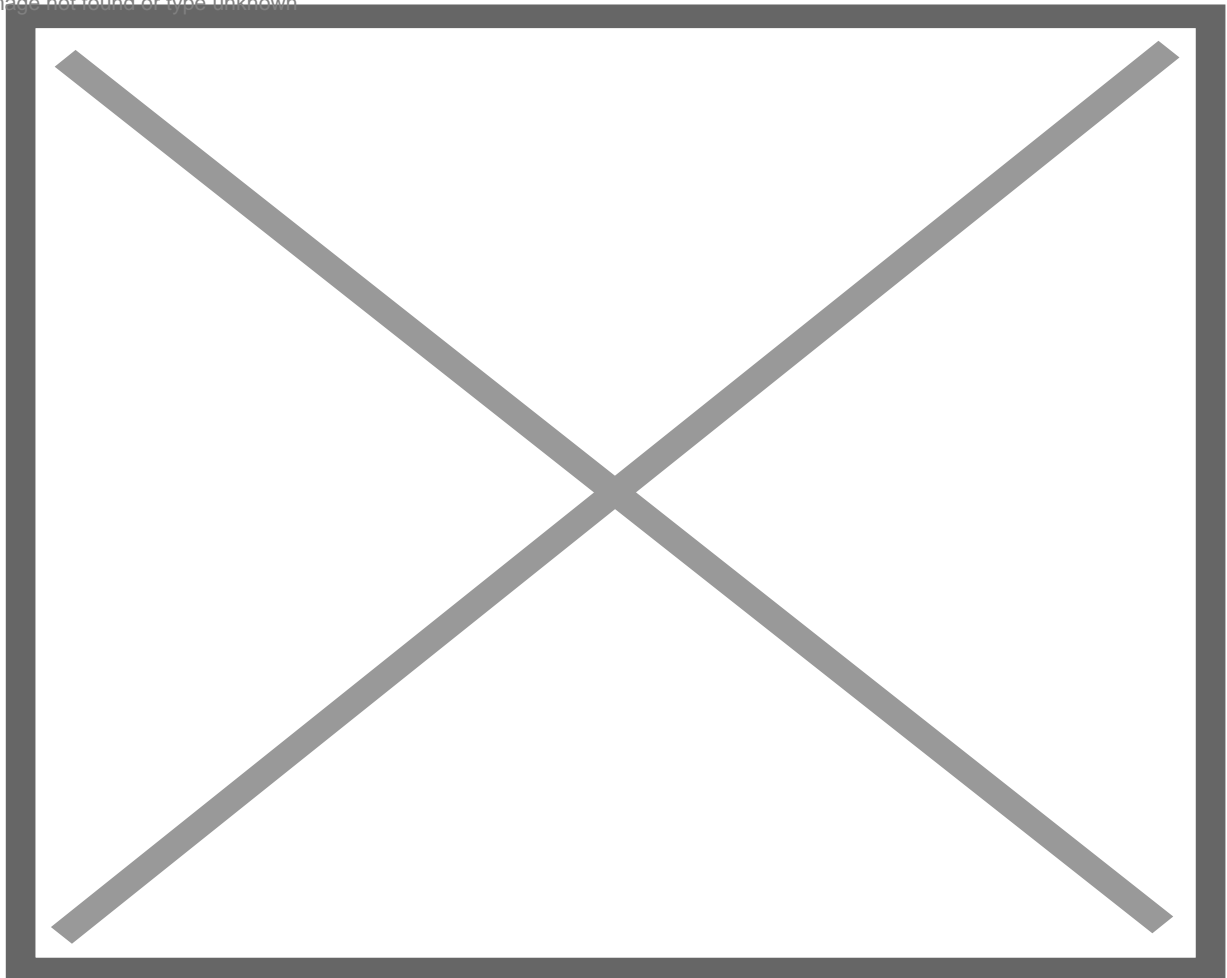
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## **Additional Confirmed Coronavirus Cases Announced; Governor Expecting 'Tsunami' Economic Impact; No Tax Refunds Anytime Soon; Major Disaster Declaration Request Sent to White House; Delta Cancels All Flights in St. Thomas Until April 24**

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Ernice Gilbert **March 27, 2020**

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The Department of Health today confirmed that it has received results for 30 coronavirus tests from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and two tested positive, while 28 returned negative. This brings the territory's total to 19, with 9 on St. Croix and 10 on St. Thomas. There were no positive cases of the virus on St. John as of Friday. Eighty-four suspected cases in total have tested negative territory-wide.

Governor Albert Bryan and Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion addressed the public at 1:00 p.m. today to provide the administration's latest update on the coronavirus. Ms. Encarnacion said D.O.H. has sent an additional 56 suspected cases — referred to as Persons Under Investigation — to the CDC for testing.

"If these numbers change over the weekend we will certainly update you," Mr. Bryan said.

Ms. Encarnacion said local tests will commence by the end of Monday, which will facilitate faster results and represents an important step in learning the real impact to date of Covid-19 on the USVI.

The health commissioner, citing the territory's 2010 population to be 106,105, and factoring the current number of confirmed cases along with tests performed so far, said, "We expect our highest number of hospitalization [to be] over 100 and we are prepared for that scenario within the territory."

D.O.H. expects between April 24-May 14 to be the territory's' most challenging time. "We say this to you because we want you to continue the implementation of social isolation," Ms. Encarnacion said. The commissioner said the department is anticipating an increase in the number of confirmed cases, and has been working with the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency and federal partners to secure increased staffing and medical equipment and supplies, including 50 additional ventilators.

Ms. Encarnacion said D.O.H. has partnered with the Schneider Regional Medical Center and the Juan F. Luis Hospital, and has ordered supplies to outfit areas within the medical facilities to support the care of the Covid-19 inpatient population.

D.O.H. to date has received and inventoried two shipments of personal protective equipment (PPEs) from the national stockpile, and a third shipment is expected very soon, the commissioner said.

### **Gov. Bryan on Airline Cancellations, Tax Refunds, Economy and Major Disaster Declaration**

Mr. Bryan reiterated that residents should stay home, "and when you absolutely have to venture into the public, maintain safe social distancing."

Airports and Seaports remain open, however, effective Saturday, Delta Airlines has cancelled all flights into St. Thomas until April 24, while Delta flights into St. Croix have been cancelled until May 2, the governor said.

The administration is also seeking a major disaster declaration from the White House, which would free up Federal Emergency Management Agency support to the territory. Mr. Bryan said he is expecting a positive response by Monday. "The nature of the application focuses on our health crisis, the growing economic crisis and the inevitable government fiscal fallout as a result of this pandemic," Mr. Bryan said.

The governor also thanked lawmakers for passing a bill that authorizes him to seek \$60 million in loans through revenue anticipation notes, in an effort to keep the central government afloat.

Near the end of his talk, the governor shifted his focus to the economic toll of the virus on the territory, and sought to prepare Virgin Islanders for the tough times ahead. "Everything that we

have done to combat the virus on the health front has created devastating impacts on the economic front," he said. "Everyday we remain under the stay-at-home order creates a worse fiscal picture not only for our businesses but for our government."

Many residents have been asking about tax refunds, contending that now more than ever they need the cash to help them through the crisis. But Mr. Bryan, recognizing the gravity of what he referred to as a "financial tsunami", said tax refunds and retro pay would have to take a backseat. "I know many of you are concerned about your tax refunds, your retro pay that is owed to you. But our collective should be how do we keep this government solvent and keep our vendors and employees paid," he said.

"We had some really dark days in the past and we are sure to have some hard decisions ahead, but rest assured that everything we've done to this point, we have done in the best interest of the public health and the safety of the people of the Virgin Islands," the governor said.

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