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Licensing and Consumer Affairs Encouraging Residents to Exercise Social Distancing When Shopping

Coronavirus / **Published On March 29, 2020 04:35 AM /**

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Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Richard Evangelista is reminding consumers to practice social distancing when shopping.

The call is timely, because social distancing — the practice of staying six feet away from any other person — is misunderstood in some quarters. Especially in and around a handful of “essential” supermarkets and gas stations on St. Thomas.

Take, for example, a group of shoppers huddled around the produce section of Plaza Extra in Tutu Park on Saturday morning. Or the three, four people congregated outside of the front doors. If you shopped there early, you ran the gauntlet of people entirely unconcerned about catching or

spreading the highly contagious, potentially deadly coronavirus.

The same can be said for some supermarkets on St. Croix, where social-distancing is not taken seriously enough by store owners.

The 23rd confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection was identified Saturday. Eleven individuals who tested positive for the COVID-19 virus live on St. Croix. Eleven reside on St. Thomas and one is from St. John, according to the the V.I. Department of Health (VIDOH).

All of the three new positive cases of COVID-19 disease disclosed Saturday were travelers or close contacts of individuals that had been in quarantine for COVID-19 exposure. The VIDOH said the newly confirmed patients and their contacts have been quarantined. None of the latest confirmed cases were "community-acquired."

"We are encouraging grocery shoppers to be mindful of the mass gathering rule," Commissioner Evangelista said. "If they are four members in your household, then all four members should not shop. Protection for your family is key."

The "big box" stores on St. Thomas were fairly organized.

Home Depot allowed entry through the main door only. People, generally, kept a safe social distance in the aisles. Customers were, at the end, directed to the checkout line and cashiers that maintained a hoped-for social distance between customers.

Last week, the DLCA and V.I.P.D. Commissioner Trevor Velinor invited major grocery retailers across the territory to meet via teleconference to share with each other all the measures implemented to protect consumers and its staff during the COVID-19.

Other best practices occurring throughout the territory include:

- Limiting the amount of essential supplies purchased per customer and allowing only a certain number of customers to shop at a time;
- Establishing dedicated time slots for senior citizens, expectant mothers, persons with disabilities and persons with high risk diseases to shop;
- Pressure washing shopping carts daily;
- Establishing a 6 feet separation between customers at each cash register and only using every cash register when necessary and opting to use every other cash register; and
- Providing gloves and hand sanitizer to the customers.