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Bryan Administration to Finally Start Screening for Coronavirus at Territory's Airports

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Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

The numbers are dwindling, but airline passengers coming into the territory will soon undergo health screening to detect symptoms of the coronavirus in an attempt to stem the spread of the respiratory disease in the territory. It's an action journalists have been asking Governor Albert Bryan about for weeks, and it was finally announced during a call-in media press briefing Wednesday.

Mr. Bryan said the local screening will be conducted by public health workers, assisted by the Virgin Islands National Guard. The screening will include taking the temperature of incoming passengers.

The new measures intended to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the territory was set to begin this past Monday, but temporal thermometers did not arrive in time, according to the administration. The thermometers measure body temperature by holding the device close to a person's forehead, which is considered safer for public health workers.

Mr. Bryan acknowledged that the new screening comes as new arrivals in the territory have slowed to a trickle. "We don't have a lot of people flying in," he said. "American has one flight a day and Delta cancelled all flights."

V.I. Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte said all of the major airlines — American Airlines, Delta Airlines, JetBlue Airways, Spirit Airlines and United Airlines — have announced cancellations and schedule reductions.

The Dept. of Tourism first announced on Tuesday that the coronavirus health screening would take place at the Cyril King and Henry Rohlsen airports. "Some travelers may be requested to self-quarantine and/ or take the COVID-19 test," the department said in a written statement.

If arriving passengers show symptoms after being tested, including a dry cough and fever, health officials will ask that these passengers self-quarantine for 14 days. There is currently no penalty in place for a person who breaks self-quarantine. Some U.S. states have put in place strict rules that come with repercussions for those who flout the rules. In Florida, for example, Gov. Ron DeSantis instructed all people entering the state from the New York tri-state area to self-quarantine for 14 days. A violation could lead to a 60-day jail sentence and fines of up to \$500.

Health officials will also ask that incoming visitors to the territory self-quarantine if they're traveling from one of the hotspot states like New York, or other states the CDC considers hot zones.