

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. of Health Said to be Performing More Tests on Younger People Because Seniors May Be Obeying Rules, Staying Home

Coronavirus / **Published On April 09, 2020 04:32 AM /**

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Health officials have confirmed another case of COVID-19 disease in the Virgin Islands, bringing the total number of people infected by the novel coronavirus to 45, as of Wednesday evening. Some 242 people tested so far have returned negative results. And of the 45 people who contracted the disease, most (39) have been free of symptoms in recent days and are considered recovered, according to the Dept. of Health.

On the national scale, U.S. coronavirus deaths have surpassed 14,700. It bears repeating. More than 14,700 people across the country have died from COVID-19

infection or from underlying illnesses exacerbated by the virus.

The territory recorded its first death related to COVID-19 on Sunday. The deceased was an 85-year-old man who lived on St. Thomas. He was not a Person Under Investigation for infection by the coronavirus, so he was never tracked, tested or screened by the health department before his death. The man was in close contact with a COVID-19 infected person, apparently contracting the disease from that contact. The deceased was tested for COVID-19 exposure post-mortem.

Gov. Albert Bryan and commissioners of health, education and human services were on hand Wednesday to provide the latest information on the spread of COVID-19 in the territory, and how the government is responding.

One local patient who tested positive for COVID-19 disease was hospitalized at Juan Luis Hospital on St. Croix. Two of three patients hospitalized at the Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas were expected to be released on Wednesday. The third remains hospitalized, Gov. Bryan said.

Comparatively, the number of positive cases in the Virgin Islands is small. That's to be expected because of the relatively small population. Also, keep in mind that the territory is still a matter of weeks, at best, away from the peak impact of the pandemic here at home, said Mr. Bryan.

According to the VI Department of Health, a total of 322 people have been tested for COVID-19.

The Youth and the Seniors

DOH statistics show that residents between the ages of 18 and 49 are, by far, the most heavily tested for the coronavirus in the territory. People 65-years-old and older get tested far less frequently.

"I would like to think it is because the older ones are staying at home and following the rules," Ms. Encarnacion said. "The younger population continues to go into the public, engage in travel around the territory and interact with others."

This suggests that greater potential exposure to the virus, and it means the 18 to 49 year olds are suffering symptoms far more frequently than the older population.

Testing Capacity

The health department fields up to sixty calls per day from residents concerned they may have been exposed on the coronavirus because of travel, or because they display the telltale symptom of COVID-19 disease: high fever, cough and shortness of breath.

Based on the information callers provide, a health department epidemiology staff member determines whether the caller meets the standards for the actual COVID-19 testing. At the moment, DOH has the capacity to conduct tests on half of the roughly 60 calls it receives daily.

“We do have the capability of conducting 30 tests per day in our public health lab. We have at least 450 swab and media viral kits so we can run those samples,” said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

Boats Moored in the V.I.

According to Gov. Bryan, there were 90 new vessels in the St. Thomas-St. John District. Twelve new vessels are reported in St. Croix district. Thirty-five vessels have left territory waters.

“We understand the anxiety of the public, but I assure you that everything we have done in our response to this pandemic has been based on facts and the science. ... None of the cases in the territory have traced back to any people from our seaports,” the governor said.

Bryan said he received at least one request from a boater that the Virgin Islands government encourage Puerto Rico and the British Virgin Islands to allow vessels to moor in those islands because the U.S. Virgin Islands coasts are getting too crowded.

“They are trying their best to stay isolated. They don’t want to come to land, they don’t want to interact with people at all,” Mr. Bryan said.