

The Virgin Islands Consortium

BVI Reports New COVID-19 Case a Day After Announcement of 24-hr Curfew Relaxation

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Tortola, BVI By. ANGELA BURNS/VI CONSORTIUM

Tortola, British Virgin Islands — BVI Minister of Health Carvin Malone on Thursday evening confirmed rumors of another COVID-19 case in the British Virgin Islands, taking the number up to two, which is however less than the highest number of 3 cases reported since the outbreak of the pandemic.

This just one day after Premier Andrew Fahie announced a relaxation of the 14-day 24-hour curfew, which he said would start on Monday with a phased internal reopening of the islands.

The Health Minister's initial unscheduled statement during the ongoing House of Assembly sitting, was interrupted by Members of the Opposition and then by Premier Fahie, who said information was still being received and Mr. Malone would move a motion later in the proceedings.

A more succinct statement was presented after the House recessed for a few minutes.

"I have been informed by the unified command team of the Health Emergency Operations Centre that an additional case of COVID-19 has been identified, swabbed and locally tested at the Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital," he read.

BVI is able to carry out local testing and he said the initial test result returned as positive.

"Once confirmed, the initial results would be announced," the Health Minister stated.

In accordance with established protocols, the swabs will be collected by the Regional Security System RSS on Friday and transported to the regional CARPHA lab in Trinidad.

Mr. Malone said the patient is in the isolation ward and all 7 primary contacts have been traced.

Local preliminary testing for the 7 returned as negative, but they are being quarantined until the local tests have been verified by CARPHA. These results should be returned within 48 hours.

The Health Minister went on to remind persons exhibiting any symptoms to call the 8527650 hotline.

He said it is important that all persons do their part and follow the established protocols of sanitizing, coughing in their elbows and staying safe at all times.

In his initial statement, Mr. Malone said the patient is a female resident who reportedly was showing symptoms but for whatever reason did not present themselves earlier.

"Traditionally, we would not have made the announcement even now as we speak, but of course it's a small place and with the activities taking a round...in the interest of full disclosure and so the nation will be comforted, the fact is that the seven persons have been tested, they all have been deemed negative, our tests have been proving quite reliable here and when they are confirmed (with CARPHA) is when we normally would report them," the Health Minister explained.

He said while the BVI does not have all of the equipment and facilities, the territory has PCR testing capabilities.

"So the \$12 million has been invested primarily in getting all of these facilities readied — the testing center (where) we can have 20-30 persons per hour tested; we have the isolation ward; 9 ventilators and 5 more coming; I told you we're going to convert the old Peebles Hospital into further isolation wards; we have 150 beds so that when we open the borders we can have the spaces ready; persons are calling and offering their hospitality spaces and I told you that we will open up the internal areas until June 1," the BVI government minister stated.

He said his government will do everything necessary to keep the British Virgin Islands safe.

Premier Fahie on Wednesday announced the first phase of the COVID-19 phased internal and restricted borders reopening plan for the first six weeks, coming out of the 24-hour mandatory curfew.

The borders will remain closed to incoming travel, schools remain closed but with teachers allowed to engage in online instruction and there will be limited access to critical businesses from April 18 for businesses to prepare to receive residents district by district from April 19-23.

A nighttime curfew will be in effect from 7pm to 6am daily, mass gatherings are limited to 20 persons, beaches are off limits and breaches of curfew will be subject to fines and temporary business closure.

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