

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory's Coronavirus Peak Expected May 8th; Mass Gatherings Not Expected Until Mid July, Governor Says

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Army Corps of Engineers Savannah District Commander, Col. Daniel H. Hibner, gives Governor Bryan a tour of a facility at the National Guard on St. Croix being prepared for coronavirus patients. By. ERNICE GILBERT/VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Bryan said Virgin Islanders should get used to a new normal in the age of the coronavirus, the deadly pathogen that has brought the world to a standstill. Giving brief remarks on Tuesday before touring a building being turned into a coronavirus alternative care facility at the V.I. National Guard base on St. Croix, the governor said he did not expect to approve mass gatherings — currently anything more than ten individuals —

until mid-July.

And even then, people will have to take precautions to guard themselves against the coronavirus, Mr. Bryan said, cautioning that the virus will be around for a while, and that spikes in cases will continue to occur until a vaccine is developed.

According to the latest numbers provided by V.I. Dept. of Health, 54 persons have tested positive for the coronavirus, 48 of whom have recovered and 3 have died. This correlates with Mr. Bryan's statement that only 3 cases were being tracked. He also pointed to a streak of ten days before another case was confirmed on St. Croix, and six days on St. Thomas.

Even so, the governor continued to urge caution. "... Even though that is true and we're not seeing as much community spread, it doesn't mean that we won't see that once we start to open our doors. And before we can start to open our doors, we have to make sure that certain things are available: the testing that's island-wide, territory-wide; to make sure that people coming into the territory are isolated as quickly as possible; [and] especially having facilities to isolate people from, and having the medical facilities in order to do it," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "It's not going away. I keep saying that. We are to a point where we have control over what's happening with the virus, but it's going to get worse, then it's going to get better, and then it's going to get worse again and then it's going to get better. It's just the way of life now that we have to deal with until we find a cure or vaccine for this. We're going to have to learn to live with the virus. That means social distancing like we do today, protecting yourselves, isolating when you're sick and making sure that you're doing your best to keep your body healthy."

Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, and Dr. Esther Ellis, D.O.H.'s Territorial Epidemiologist, were on the tour as well. During the tour, Army Corps of Engineers Savannah District Commander, Col. Daneil H. Hibner, kept referring to May 8th as the date the U.S. Virgin Islands is expected to see its peak cases and hopefully thereafter trend down. Dr. Ellis said the model used to determine the peak date was utilized in early March. "You don't rerun a model you just look at where you're at relative to that model," she said. Dr. Ellis said the territory has been behind the model, which she said is a good outcome as it gives the territory's medical facilities more time to prepare for a potential surge in positive cases.

The model also took into account the RO (pronounced RNaught) of the virus, which is the number of people that an infected individual is expected to infect. For the territory, the RO was 2.4. "So that means any confirmed case is expected to give it to 2.4 people if [there's] no public health intervention," Dr. Ellis said. However, with shelter in place rules put in place by the administration, the RO has gone down to 1.1, "and it will continue to go down as we continue to shelter in place," she said.