

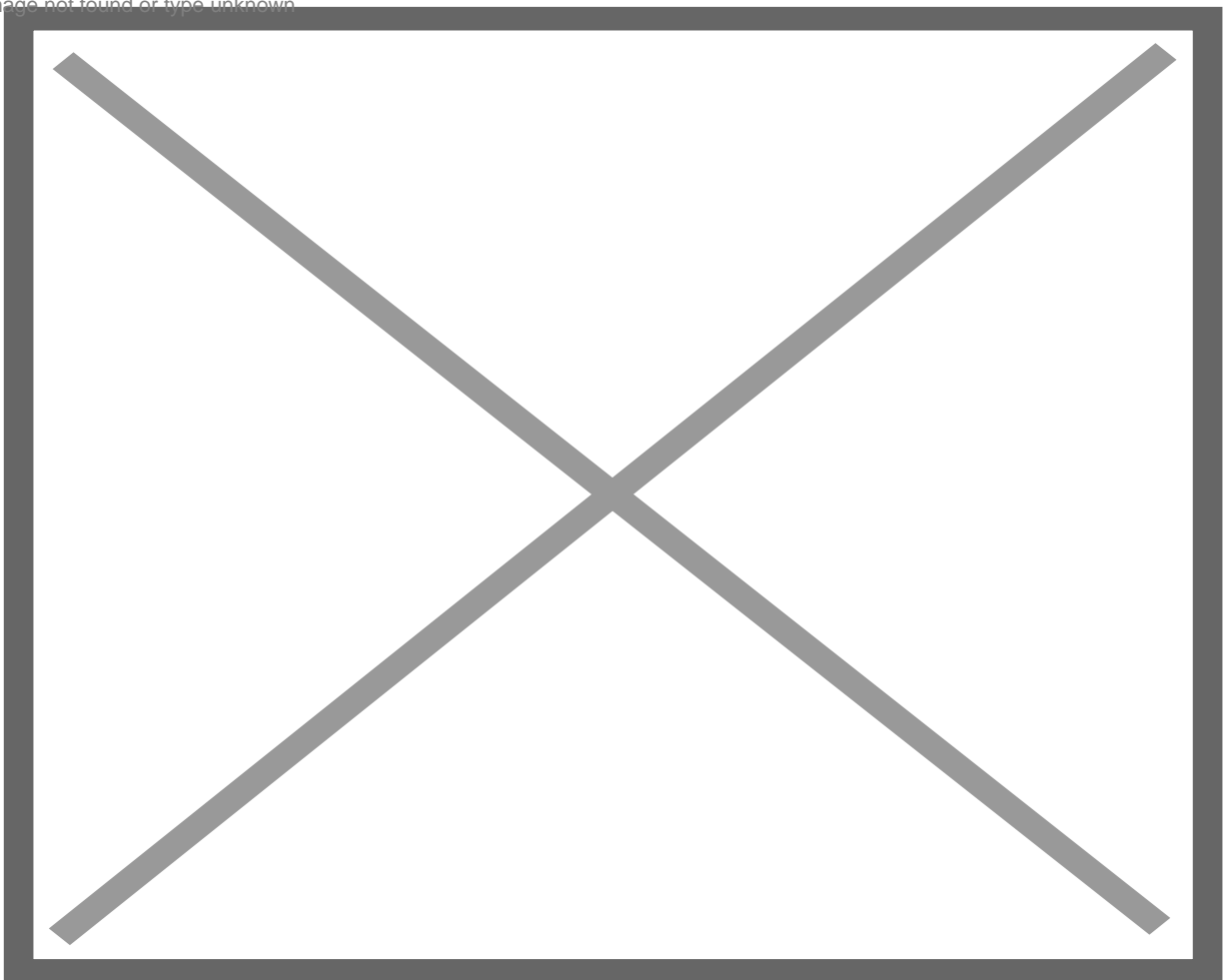
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Reopening of VI Economy Begins May 4 With Non-Essentials Services, Churches, Movie Theaters, Bowling Alleys and More; Face Masks Now a Requirement When Entering Establishments

Economy / **Published On April 29, 2020 05:33 PM /**

Robert Moore **April 29, 2020**

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Caribbean Cinemas on St. Croix By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

Virgin Islands Governor Albert Bryan on Wednesday laid out a plan for the phased reopening of the territory, the first step towards a new normalcy in the current coronavirus crisis.

Beginning Monday, May 4, the territory will move into a less-restrictive phase referred to as “Safer at Home” whereby some lower-risk businesses, such as retail, recreational, personal grooming and other establishments can begin doing business once more. New guidelines to assure

customer and employee protection from the spread of coronavirus were announced as well.

“The most significant change in our status requires that all individuals that patronize commercial establishments wear a facial covering before they enter the premises,” Mr. Bryan said. “No mask, no service.” Personal protection wear does not mean the medical-grade N95 masks health care providers utilize, rather simple face coverings that help protect individuals from spreading or contracting the COVID-19 disease.

Key new changes include:

- All gatherings of people require facial coverings and appropriate social distancing. Children under 2 years old and those with acute respiratory ailments are exempt from the facial covering mandate.
- Retail Stores: No more than 10 customers are permitted into a retail store at any given time. Grocery stores and big box stores, such as Home Depot and Kmart, are exempt from the 10-person rule.

“Remember, no mask, no service. No business is allowed to provide indoor service without a mask or outdoor service without a mask,” Mr. Bryan said.

- Public and private schools will remain closed.
- Restaurants are still limited to take-out, delivery or drive-through services. “
- Personal Grooming Services: Barbershops, hair salons and massage therapists and the like are permitted to operate by appointment only.

“They must employ strict hygiene guidelines and frequent sanitation procedures for all their contact services in the shop and the tools,” Mr. Bryan said. “This include hand sanitizer for all patrons upon entrance to those establishments, a mask in place for the entire time of the visit.”

No more than five customers will be allowed in any establishment at any given time to wait. No more than 10 people, including employees can be there at any time. Large establishments can seek a waiver from the rule by contacting the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs. The Department of Health is expected to provide more specific guidelines on how personal grooming operations can do business offering the maximum level of customer and provider safety.

- Recreational facilities such as gyms, tennis courts and golf courses are allowed to reopen. Contact sports like basketball, for example, remain strictly prohibited.
- Bowling alleys and movie theatres must open, but no selling of food or beverages on the premises.
- Visitation to nursing homes are still prohibited. Child care facilities and school remain closed. Department of Human Services will be giving more guidelines.
- Private offices may reopen, but all employees not critical to in-person services should be encouraged to work from home.
- Government operations remain in their current hold pattern and all conditions for public interaction remain in place until further notice.
- Private health care facilities may resume procedures if they follow required safety protocols.

- Churches may conduct services providing they don't exceed a capacity of 50 individuals and all, including the pastor, wear face masks
- The social distancing requirement of at least 6 feet remains in place for general purposes between customers when not directly conducting service
- Employers should encourage frequent breaks to wash hands and employees showing any signs of illness should remain at home.
- Employees should wear face masks when interacting with customer
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The details of the phased reopening also include, but are not limited to:

- The current stay-at-home order continues until 6 a.m. Monday, May 4
- The intention of the "Safer At Home" order is to begin the phased-reopening of the local economy in preparation for returning access to the outside world

The transition will be managed according to a five-tiered system:

Red – Total quarantine

Orange – Current Stay-At-Home order (in effect until 6 a.m. Monday, May 4)

Yellow – Safer At Home order (effective May 4)

Blue – Open Doors (hotel reservations and leisure guest bookings permitted; restaurants open for seating – anticipated June 1)

Green – New Normal

Public health officials are tracking seven active cases of COVID-19 in the territory as of Wednesday afternoon, Gov. Albert Bryan said during a Government House update on coronavirus response.

Among the updated numbers:

- 872 total tests administered.
- 732 people tested negative
- 62 people tested positive for COVID-19 infection
- 78 tests are pending
- 3 people are hospitalized at the Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix; no COVID-19 patients were hospitalized at the Roy Lester Schneider Medical Center.

"Pay less attention to the total number of cases. We had 62 positive cases in the territory over the past several weeks, months," Mr. Bryan said. "We have to focus on the active seven cases we have. Those are the ones we need to pay attention to, and three people hospitalized.