

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Movie Theaters To Remain Closed Until June; 7,000 Residents File Unemployment Claims, Though Number May Be Off, Bryan Says; Pandemic EBT Cards Announced

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Shoppers, Cashiers, Don't mask at Plaza Extra East on the first day of Governor Bryan's new order that calls for masks to be worn when entering businesses establishments By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan said today that some 7,000 Virgin Islanders had filed for unemployment benefits, a staggering number that brings into focus the damage the coronavirus has wrought on the territory's economy. Even so, Mr. Bryan stressed that the

number may be off because of possible duplicate filing. The governor said 2,430 checks had been processed as of Monday.

The territory's leader also said he was advised that the territory's movie theaters, owned by Caribbean Cinemas, would not reopen until June. The theater chain, which has arms in a number of Caribbean islands, is following U.S. mainland theater companies that have remained closed in states with phased reopening plans as major movie releases have been delayed — [some into 2021](#).

Tropical Ten Pins on St. Croix, the bowling alley located in Castle Coakley, will remain closed for the time being; Mr. Bryan said the facility's owners had advised that they were remaining closed until a protocol for reopening had been prepared.

Chicken and Bowling in St. Thomas is no longer in business, "so they won't be opening their bowling alley at all," Mr. Bryan said.

The governor, who provided his first coronavirus response update since Wednesday, spoke on some of the rules that went into effect today as part of his new order, the current phase of which is the "Safer at Home" plan. The most prominent orders in the Safer at Home phase is the donning of face masks before entering establishments, and the opening of non-essential businesses. The administration invited a Dept. of Health employee to demonstrate effective wearing of masks.

Additionally, the governor said the U.S. Treasury had accepted the V.I. Bureau of Internal Revenue's plan for issuing the \$84.7 million in stimulus checks to VI residents, and that the funds could be received as soon as the end of next week.

Additional updates:

- Ski masks are prohibited indoors and outdoors as a means of addressing the need for a mask in commercial establishments.
- Taxis, safaris and cars for hire are considered commercial establishments and all occupants must have masks.
- Free "No Mask, No Service" signs for businesses will be available from the Department of Property and Procurement offices and Department of Consumer Affairs offices in both districts.
- "Safer at Home" rules have been adjusted to allow religious leaders to give their sermons without masks as long as they stay at least 10 feet away from the congregation.
- The public is asked to report businesses in violation of the "No Mask, No Service" policy by calling DLCA at 340-713-3522 on St. Croix and 340-714-3522 on St. Thomas.

Pandemic EBT cards

Funds from the federal CARES Act have been made available to children who participate in the school lunch program for extra food benefits, called Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT, and will be about \$300 per child.

Families will receive a P-EBT card for each eligible child to be used on food and groceries, and the program is administered through the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services.

All children attending public schools are eligible to receive P-EBT cards.

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