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Bryan Administration Gives Restaurants Until June 22 to Start Serving Customers With Disposable Plates, Forks and Other Serving Utensils

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The V.I. Department of Health, through the Division of Environmental Health, announced Thursday that it has suspended enforcement of non-compliance for using single-service tableware — disposable serving utensils such as plates, forks, spoons and knives — until June 22. This postponement will allow retail service establishments such as restaurants and other outfits sufficient time to purchase the disposable items, D.O.H. said.

The move follows [swift backlash](#) after D.O.H. [announced](#) on Monday during the administration's Covid-19 press briefing that restaurant owners would have until June 15th to start using disposable products when serving diners.

D.O.H. cited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Best Practices for Reopening Retail Food Establishments during the COVID-19 Pandemic Food Safety Checklist", which strongly recommends the use of single-service and single-use products to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

"In the meanwhile, all establishments should ensure that all reusable food service items are washed and sanitized with dish soap and hot water or in a mechanical dishwasher (see our three-compartment sink factsheet for additional guidance). All washed and sanitized reusable food service items must be handled with cleaned, washed hands," the health department said.

D.O.H. advised restaurants and bars to consider several strategies to maintain healthy environments. "Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, cash registers, workstations, sink handles, bathroom stalls) at least daily, or as much as possible and as required by food safety requirements. Clean shared objects (e.g., payment terminals, tables, countertops/bars, receipt trays, condiment holders) between each use."

"If immersion in hot water is used for sanitizing cookware in a manual operation, the temperature of the water should be maintained at 77oC (171oF) or above. In contrast, the temperature of the wash solution in manual ware washing equipment should be kept at not less than 43oC (110oF) or the temperature specified on the cleaning agent manufacturer's label instructions," the department advised.

D.O.H. added, "When using a chemical sanitizer in a solution for manual or mechanical operation, A chlorine solution has a minimum temperature based on the concentration and PH of the solution, as listed in the following chart.

"To protect consumers and staff, limit the number of customers in the restaurant to 50% of seating capacity not to exceed 50 people. Tables should be spaced at least 6 feet apart and should be limited to no more than 6 guests per table. Mark any indoor or outdoor waiting area so that social distancing standards are met (options can include a text system to alert guests of available seating, an intercom system, or only one member of a party being allowed to wait in the waiting area).

"Reservations are highly recommended as they allow for proper screening of patrons and can assist the Department of Health's Epidemiology team with contact tracing efforts if a positive case is traced back to a restaurant. When taking a reservation, a name and phone number should be required."

The health department said the following screening questions will decrease the risk of a sick person entering an establishment:

- Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?
- Are you experiencing a cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
- Have you had a fever in the last 48 hours?

D.O.H. said the best practice is to screen customers for illness upon their entry into the restaurant by performing temperature checks for every customer in addition to the screening questions above. Customers with temperatures above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit should not be permitted on-premise.

"Masks or facial coverings should be worn by all patrons and should be worn at all times except when eating or drinking. Patrons should wear facial coverings when they leave their seats or when they are waiting for food or drinks," the department said. "Masks or facial coverings should be worn by ALL staff. Shields without coverings over the nose and mouth are not allowed. Shields are not to be worn alone."

For more information regarding bar and restaurant guidelines, contact the Division of Environmental Health Services on St. Croix at 340-718-1311 ext. 3707 or St. Thomas/St. John at 340-774-9000 ext. 4642.

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