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Bryan Keeps USVI Under 'Open Doors' Phase As Covid-19 Outbreak Spreads Through Limetree and Total Cases Surge to 217

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Limetree Bay Terminals and Refinery By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan during his coronavirus press briefing on Monday said his administration has considered reverting back to the "Safer at Home" phase of reopening, a move that would call for the closure of non-essential businesses, reduce the number of people allowed to gather in one place (currently 50), and potentially order lodging facilities to stop accepting reservations.

But the governor — even as Covid-19 cases have surged to 217 positives after an explosion of the virus in the Limetree Bay facility on St. Croix's South Shore — has refused to rollback the reopening plan.

On March 19, the territory was tracking only 3 active coronavirus cases when the governor ordered the shutdown of non-essential businesses, limited gatherings to 10, and ordered lodging facilities not to accept reservations — essentially shutting down the territory. The administration managed to control the spread of the virus at the time, though weak travel protocols allowed Covid-19 to continue infecting individuals — possibly leading to the current outbreak at Limetree Bay.

Now, with 106 cases being tracked, gathering capacity remains at 50, non-essentials remain open, and hotels continue to accept guests. Asked by the Consortium what it would take to revert back to the "Safer at Home" phase, Mr. Bryan said different strategies may need to be utilized on different islands, a comment that spoke to the outbreak on St. Croix and the much smaller caseload on St. Thomas and St. John. As of Monday, St. Thomas was tracking 19 active cases, while St. John was tracking 3 actives. Mr. Bryan said a Safer at Home revert would primarily focus on St. Croix and would last between 2-4 weeks. If cases escalate in St. Thomas and St. John, the phase would be implemented in said district well.

The governor also spoke of the need to balance the pandemic response with economic survival. "Finding that right balance between how do we make sure that the people who don't work for the government eat, and how do we make sure that we keep being able to process our payroll at the government at the same time — all while keeping our spread to a level that we think we can manage," Mr. Bryan said.

Enforcement of Quarantine for Travelers

Asked about beefed up restrictions for travelers, more pointedly the enforcement of quarantining, the governor said the Dept. of Health had some strategies that were being worked on, which he couldn't divulge. But the governor also stuck to his previous belief that quarantining has to be a personal responsibility. "At the end of the day we can't detain anybody because we think they have Covid, or may have Covid," he said. "Certainly if you are moving about the community and you are infected, we could arrest you, but it's a matter of civil liberties." He said no one was creating Covid jails and locking individuals up who break quarantine, adding that he didn't think such action would be a viable approach.

"For the most part, I think the commissioner [of Health] would agree that people have adhered to the quarantine when they've been found to be positive," Mr. Bryan said.

Hawaii has been [arresting individuals who break quarantine and sending them back to their destination of origin](#). New York Governor Andrew Cuomo [has ordered](#) that travelers from states on New York's quarantine list fill out a form that state officials will use to track travelers and ensure they're following quarantine restrictions. Failure to fill out the list will result in a \$2,000 fine. Impacted travelers could face a hearing and an order requiring mandatory quarantine, under a new state emergency health order issued Monday.

And in Florida, which has become the new epicenter of the virus in the U.S. after recording over 15,000 cases of Covid-19 in one day — the highest single-day jump in any state on record — People from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut must self-quarantine at their own expense for 14 days when they enter Florida. Violators may be fined up to \$500 or imprisoned for up to 60 days, [according to The New York Times](#).

Discussions on Shutting Down Limetree Bay

Mr. Bryan said his administration's efforts to blunt the spread of the virus at the refinery and storage terminal was working, and he reminded the listening and viewing audiences of joint action taken last week, among them universal testing at the facility and Man Camp lockdown. Mr. Bryan further stated that he was to meet with Limetree officials yesterday at 5:00 p.m. to discuss additional steps to mitigate the virus's spread, "to make sure we have this situation under control."

"This situation unfortunately confirms our worst fears, but yet is another example of how very real this virus is and the importance of adherence to the health guidelines that have been put in place," Mr. Bryan said.

Even so, the governor said while his administration has weighed shutting down the facility, such action would be an arduous task that needs careful planning. One issue is how small the Man Camp rooms are, according to the governor. "How do you keep a thousand people locked in their rooms for two weeks...? You may make it worse in some cases," he said. It was unclear why Man Camp residents would need to remain locked in their rooms and not be able to step outside while remaining within the confines of the Man Camp.

"It's a lot of different things and moving parts there, that's why if we're going to lock it down, we're going to lock it down the right way. And I'm not just talking about the refinery, I'm talking about the territory — maybe even just St. Croix — in order to fight this.

"I don't lose any sleep over doing it. I just want to make sure when we do, we do it in a way that maintains people's safety, and still allow people to bring food to their table," Mr. Bryan said.

In attesting to why the administration believes the virus has been under control at the refinery, the governor provided statistics. He said there were 2,685 workers at the facility, 985 of whom live at the Man Camp, while 1,700 live outside. "Half of that 1,700 are local residents that reside on St. Croix," Mr. Bryan made known. To date, 1,386 individuals at Limetree Bay have been tested, with 69 testing positive, which equates to a 4.9 percent positivity rate — below the 10 percent threshold considered worrisome.

The governor said Limetree has ramped up testing to 300 people daily. He said 40 individuals who work at the facility but are not residents of the Man Camp, have tested positive, 58 percent of whom are currently active cases, or 20 individuals. Additionally, 29 individuals inside the Man Camp have tested positive, while 42 percent of those individuals are active cases. Mr. Bryan revealed that 59 of the 69 individuals that have tested positive at the facility show no symptoms, or otherwise exhibit "really really mild symptoms," the governor said. It is worth noting that someone with mild symptoms of the virus can infect another person who could become a severe case and die.

The governor said besides the Limetree Bay infections, the rest of the territory falls in line with his administration's expectations relative to confirmed cases under the "Open Doors" phase of reopening. According to the Dept. of Health, St. Thomas's confirmed cases stood at 62 as of Monday, with 19 active, 42 recovered, and two fatalities. St. John saw only one additional case on Monday, the cause of which was still under investigation.

On St. Croix, there were 10 confirmed cases on Monday, bringing the island's total confirmed total to 148 — 83 of which remain active, 61 recovered, and 4 fatalities.

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