

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Youth Rehabilitation Center, Coronavirus Exposure Even as Residents are Kept at the Facility

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The Youth Rehabilitation Center located in Estate Anna's Hope on St. Croix was exposed to the coronavirus after an employee tested positive for the disease. This employee had come in contact with other employees of the facility nearly two weeks ago after returning to work following a trip outside the territory. This employee also came in contact with the delinquent youth who reside at Y.R.C. but continued working at the facility, according to people familiar with the situation who requested anonymity to speak freely. This employee was only tested last weekend and did not quarantine after returning from the trip.

The Consortium received a number of calls from individuals, two of whom said employees were concerned for their wellbeing and had planned on staging a sickout in protest for their safety because the Department of Human Services, which governs Y.R.C., had failed to take swift action.

D.H.S. last week issued a release on the exposure and said all employees would be tested. Kimberly Causey-Gomez, D.H.S.'s commissioner, told the Consortium late Wednesday afternoon that the Dept. of Health had performed tests on all residents and all but two or three employees of Y.R.C. on Tuesday.

But the exposure happened roughly two weeks ago and the tests only took place on Tuesday. Additionally, of concern to many employees is the status of the six residents of Y.R.C., who as of today were being held at the facility even after the exposure. Other government arms, including the Dept. of Health, shutdown after an employee in the St. Croix office tested positive for the virus.

Ms. Causey-Gomez said D.H.S. was awaiting the results of the tests, during which time employees are to report to work. "I can't comment because I don't know what the results will be," she said.

On the U.S. mainland, [hundreds of thousands of prisoners were released](#) because of Covid-19, with correctional facilities fearing an outbreak as cases rose. Asked by the Consortium whether D.H.S. had considered sending home the Y.R.C. residents for at least two weeks — juvenile delinquent youth who have committed crimes but are below the age of ordinary prosecution — Ms. Causey-Gomez said it was out of her jurisdiction to make that decision.

"That's a court order for them to be remanded to Y.R.C., so Human Services does not have control and custody like that. So it's a court mandated remand to the Youth Rehabilitation Center," she said. Asked whether D.H.S. couldn't reach out to the court and request that residents be sent home temporarily because of the exposure, Ms. Causey-Gomez said, "In the event that any of the residents are positive then they will also then expose their families if they were sent home.."

When pressed on what D.H.S. would do with residents who test positive, the commissioner said, "It depends. Right now there are a couple of different scenarios because some are scheduled to be released in the next week, so I would prefer to wait until I know what the results are before I make a decision, and that's what I'm doing right now."

The commissioner said the residents reside in individual rooms. She added that she was in communication with all but one of the residents' family members.

On Wednesday night, 5,453 Covid-19 tests were performed territory-wide, with 5,036 returning negative, 249 positive, 120 recoveries and 123 active cases, according to the Dept. of Health. Six individuals have died from the virus in the USVI: Two on St. Thomas and four on St. Croix.

