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It's Safe to Shop of Plaza Extra East, Dept. of Health Says Following Rumor Warning Residents to Steer Clear of Grocery Store

Business / **Published On July 31, 2020 05:02 AM /**

Staff Consortium **July 31, 2020**

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ST. CROIX — A rumor that warned residents to steer clear of Plaza Extra East because someone at the store had tested positive for the coronavirus — while ignoring the fact that no other employee had tested positive at the time and the employee in question, who returned to work on Monday, had fully recovered, according to the Department of Health — has caused the grocery store to lose considerable business, according to store owners.

The rumor made the rounds on social media and spread widely on WhatsApp. D.O.H. on Wednesday night issued a release encouraging Virgin Islanders not to discriminate against individuals who have recovered from the virus.

"We have seen posts warning the public to stay away from Plaza East, and have heard similar warnings about other establishments, as well as reports of individuals being mistreated because of suspicion that they were infected with COVID-19. Some were never infected, and others had already recovered," D.O.H. said. "Such warnings are unfair and unwarranted. The Department of Health follows positive, suspected cases and their contacts closely and makes the determination when someone is no longer contagious."

D.O.H. added, "Just as when a person recovers from any other illness, they are expected to be able to resume normal activities, including work. The same must be true for persons who have recovered from COVID-19. In fact, that recovered individual is the safest person to be around," D.O.H. said.

Seeking clarity on the Plaza Extra East matter, the Consortium contacted D.O.H. for more information. In a response provided Thursday evening, D.O.H. said, "A Plaza Extra East employee tested positive for COVID-19 and has since recovered. There have been no other positive employees. According to our territorial epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, she is not sure if and how many other employees may have tested negative over time. It is safe to shop at Plaza Extra East, but like entering any business, wearing a mask and maintaining physical distance is critical."

D.O.H. further stated that there is no higher risk for entering one business or agency over the other. "However, it is critical for you to continue to abide by the guidance on wearing masks and social distancing.

"There is no need to scorn anyone who may have been infected in the past. Welcome your coworker back to work and always wear your mask properly, wash hands frequently, and maintain physical distance at all times," said the health department.