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# BVI Goes Into Lockdown, to Include Curfew, As Covid-19 Cases Surge

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ROAD TOWN, British Virgin Islands, CMC — British Virgin Islands (BVI) Governor Augustus Jaspert has announced a lock down of the British Overseas Territory as it seeks to deal with an upsurge in the number of coronavirus cases.

The BVI has recorded one death and 25 positive cases of the virus that has so far killed 820,000 people and infected 23.9 million others worldwide as of Wednesday, since it was first detected in China last December.

Jaspert said that with effect from Wednesday, for seven days in the first instance, only those businesses that provide essential services will be open and all other businesses and work places must be closed.

"People will be free to leave their homes during 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (local time) but we ask that you limit this as much as possible and only do so to access essential services and activities," Jaspert said.

He said that the BVI was now recording further cases of COVID-19 and is now being classified as "having clusters of cases".

"Intensive contact tracing and further testing is underway. The test kits, lab equipment and rapid testing machine supplied by the United Kingdom are contributing to the speed at which this can be done," he said.

Jaspert said the Cabinet had "debated long and hard on how to avoid a full lockdown, while ensuring the safety and protection of the people.

"These decisions have been driven by one motivation: to protect you and to protect the overall population of the territory," he said. "Our strategy as a Cabinet throughout has been to put safety first – to be safe rather than sorry. We have to balance the need to keep people safe, to keep our economy going as much as possible and the need for essential services to operate.

"We have had to make difficult decisions. And I know those decisions will affect people's livelihoods, their income, businesses and way of life. We need to use this chance we have now to try to halt the virus and that is why we are moving to restricting businesses to only absolutely essential areas.

"We are also asking people to restrict their movements only to those that are essential. The safest thing you can do is to avoid contact with other people as much as possible," the governor said.

Jaspert told citizens that there will be a "hard curfew" each day from 5:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. and during that time, persons will be required to stay in their homes or the confines of their yard.

The governor said he was also urging all employers of any business that is permitted to be open to be responsible and close in good time to allow their employees and customers time to get home before the curfew.

He said public service will be closed to the public and public officers will carry out their duties remotely, except for certain essential services.

"The restrictions on movement of vessels within our territorial waters will remain in place. All private and commercial vessels shall be prohibited from traveling within the territorial waters, with the exception of fisherfolk where authorized and intra-island ferries. There is no travel permitted to Anegada unless as approved. All other vessels should return to dock."

There has been talk that travel between St. Thomas — which is experiencing the worst Covid-19 outbreak in the U.S. Virgin Islands — and Tortola had contributed to the latest spike in cases in the BVI. USVI Governor Albert Bryan mentioned the BVI surge during his Monday Covid-19 press briefing, and urged St. Thomas residents not to visit the BVI if they don't have to.

"If you're not supposed to be going across to those waters, please don't travel over or try to get in," Bryan said. "We've had some cases over there, they don't know where they came from."

Jaspert said that to enable essential services and workers to operate during the hard lock-down period, there will be a new curfew pass scheme in place.

"All current curfew passes are invalid and new curfew passes will be issued only to the limited list of those requiring them for essential services and while on duty," he said, adding that the full list of those essential services will be published on the government's website. Companies seeking passes for employees should submit a list for essential workers to the Health Emergency Operations Centre on [ministryofhealth@gov.vg](mailto:ministryofhealth@gov.vg).

Jaspert said during the full lockdown earlier this year, the authorities demonstrated that they can effectively deliver services to the public, and that he remains confident that they can continue to do so.

"I know many businesses have also made great strides in enabling staff to work remotely. Working from home for many of us will be the order of the day in the coming period. We have had a period of adaptation and I applaud all those who have changed routines and practices to ensure safe distancing and follow hygiene protocols. There is a risk that with the period of no cases that we had over the last months that some persons may become complacent. This must not happen."

Jaspert said that it was not a time for selfishness or individuals thinking they are invincible and cannot spread the virus.

"Your actions can help protect us all – particularly our elderly and more vulnerable. You must abide by the social distancing advice. Please follow the health guidelines – wear a mask, wash your hands for 20 seconds, limit physical contact with people and comply with other health advice. The government will do all it deems necessary, but the actions you take will determine how successful we are as a territory in reducing the spread of the virus," he said.

The governor said that people have rightly expressed concern about the small number of individuals who are not following the rules and concerns about the border security.

"As we impose restrictions internally and have strict measures in place for people traveling through the legitimate routes into the territory, we must ensure that our borders are secure and that people comply with the required measures.

"There was a previous offer from the UK to help to bolster the territory's border security in the early days of COVID-19. That offer was not supported at the time. I will be discussing with the National Security Council what support might now be needed and will update in due course," he added.

Jaspert said he is aware that the next period will be difficult, adding "these restrictions will create hardships for those businesses and employees affected.

"But they are necessary, and we do not undertake them lightly. I am calling on all in the British Virgin Islands to make what we sincerely hope will be short-term sacrifices now, so that we can get through this together.

"In the coming days we have a chance to reverse the risk that the virus takes hold in the territory. We need everyone's support on this. Every single one of us is on the front-line in the fight against this virus. Every single one of us can play our part.

"The virus will not discriminate against between people and we all need to be together in our resolve to give it no chance to spread. That is why we are taking further action as a government but we are also asking everyone to play their part," Jaspert said.

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