

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Prison Cleared From Quarantine Following Outbreak That Left 47 People Infected With Covid-19

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Alexander A. Farrelly Criminal Complex

The V.I. Department of Health has lifted the public health quarantine at the St. Thomas Jail, the Bureau of Corrections announced Thursday morning. The action follows a [Covid-19 outbreak at the facility in August](#) that affected a total of 47 individuals — 37 inmates and 11 staff members — prompting D.O.H. to place the facility under lockdown and quarantine to quell what was at the time rapid spread of the virulent disease through the inmate population.

According to B.O.C., there are currently no positive Covid-19 cases at the St. Thomas prison, officially named the Alexander A. Farrelly Criminal Complex. Additionally, there has been no suspected or reported case of the coronavirus at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility on St. Croix (John A. Bell Facility), which B.O.C. said has remained COVID-19 free thus far.

The St. Thomas prison is now cleared to accept new inmates, though it remains closed to all visitors and contractors, the bureau said. All new intakes at the St. Thomas prison must still be tested for the coronavirus before arriving at the facility and quarantined for 14 days before entering the general jail population. B.O.C. staff at the St. Thomas prison continue to wear personal protective equipment (PPEs) when appropriate, B.O.C. said.

Work detail, work release, and furlough programs for inmates remain suspended until further notice at both the St. Croix and St. Thomas facilities, B.O.C. made known. Attorneys may visit with prisoners via secure video conference by contacting the respective facility to schedule a video visit.

B.O.C. said it has also stockpiled necessary PPEs for its staff, including N95 respirators, surgical masks, gloves, gowns, face shields, and Tyvex suits. In addition, the bureau has obtained negative pressure isolation tents, ordered before the outbreak, which can be used to temporarily isolate any prisoner with an infectious disease. To effectively screen staff, inmates, and guests who enter its facilities, B.O.C. said it has asked for COVID-19 rapid testing machines at each facility.

It was unclear as to how the virus had infiltrated the St. Thomas facility. The practice in prisons across the U.S. has been to ascertain that tests are performed on all prisoners before they are allowed into a prison facility, so as to not infect other inmates. In some states, [inmates have sued corrections bureaus](#) alleging that enough was not done to protect them from contracting the deadly disease.

Over the course of the outbreak, a total of 36 prisoners and 11 B.O.C. staff tested positive for the coronavirus, B.O.C. said. "All have since recovered. No prisoner required hospitalization. All BOC staff who tested positive for COVID-19 have returned to work. As of today, there are no active coronavirus cases at the St. Thomas Jail," B.O.C. stated.

The last positive test result for the coronavirus at the St. Thomas prison was on September 8, when a prisoner tested positive. Afterward, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention along with D.O.H. conducted two rounds of testing without finding any new coronavirus cases among staff or prisoners, B.O.C. said. After two consecutive weeks of negative test results, the health department, in consultation with the CDC, agreed to lift the public health quarantine at the St. Thomas prison facility.

"I am extremely proud of the work by BOC staff on both islands," said Wynnie Testamark, B.O.C. director. "We successfully managed the outbreak at the St. Thomas Jail, so that no inmate required hospitalization. And we have prevented the introduction of COVID-19 at John Bell thus far. We are grateful that the staff and prisoners at the St. Thomas Jail who tested positive for the coronavirus have since recovered.

She added, "I want to thank our nursing staff especially. They spotted the early COVID-19 symptoms among 2 cellmates on a Sunday afternoon and immediately swung into

action. Their early, decisive and correct action probably saved lives.”

B.O.C. also expressed gratitude to D.O.H., the CDC, V.I.P.D., VITEMA, the V.I. Judiciary, and other partner agencies that collaborated with the corrections facility during the Covid-19 outbreak at the St. Thomas prison. “D.O.H. and the CDC were with us every step of the way,” Ms. Testamark said.

The bureau said it has taken concrete steps to minimize the COVID-19 risk at its facilities in accordance with CDC guidelines. See BOC Updated COVID-19 protocols, lasted updated in July, [here](#).