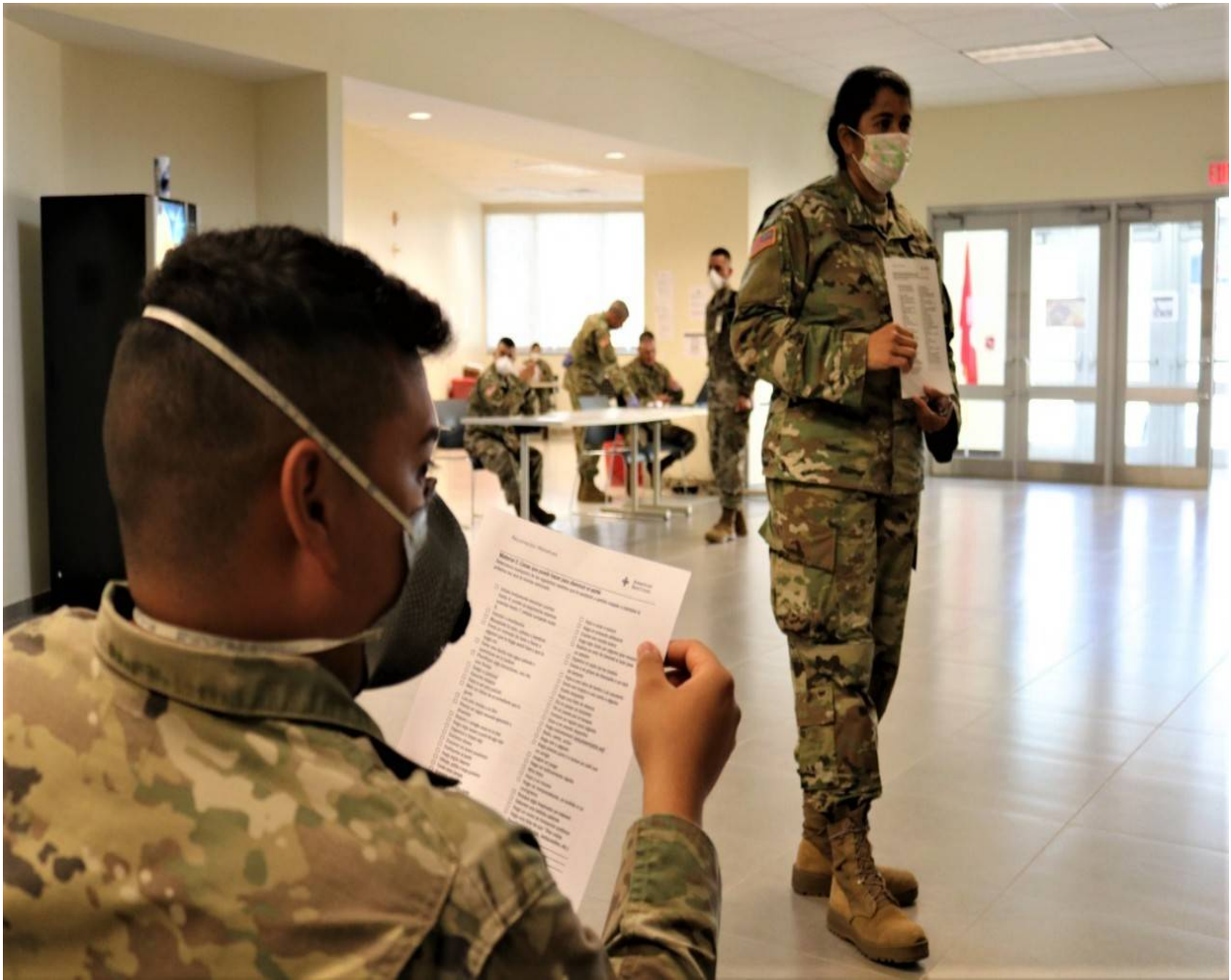


The Virgin Islands Consortium

With Cases Rising, Puerto Rico Activates National Guard to Stem Surge, Enforce Curfew

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Members of the Puerto Rico National Guard attend a Mind-Body workshop on techniques to help decrease stress during their COVID-19 frontline work. By. THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Puerto Rico's governor announced Friday that she will activate the National Guard to help enforce a curfew aimed at curbing a rise in COVID-19 cases and other measures, including once again closing beaches to everyone except those doing exercise.

Gov. Wanda Vázquez also said the government will limit capacity at restaurants, casinos, gyms, churches and other places to 30%.

The new restrictions start Nov. 16 and will remain in place until Dec. 11. Face masks and a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew remain mandatory.

“We will not under any circumstance allow our health system to be placed at risk,” she said. “There are many who have lowered their guard and have not understood that this pandemic is still with us.”

Vázquez also urged people across Puerto Rico to be extremely cautious during the holiday season, encouraging families to get together via Zoom. She said that if violations continue into mid-December, she would close down more businesses and implement more restrictive measures.

Health Department Secretary Lorenzo González said the island is seeing more than 600 infections a day, a number he said could rise to 1,200 or more by late December. He also noted that the number of people hospitalized for COVID-19 has spiked in the last month.

“We have outbreaks and infections in every corner,” he said.

The island of 3.2 million people has reported more than 40,500 confirmed cases, more than 35,400 suspected ones and more than 900 deaths.

The new measures come as Puerto Rico struggles to recover from hurricanes, earthquakes and an economic and financial crisis that began more than a decade ago.

“These are difficult times,” said Manuel Laboy, secretary of the island’s Department of Economic Development and Commerce. “This is causing an economic crisis without precedent.”

He said local officials are talking with the U.S. government and a federal control board overseeing the island’s finances to find additional ways to help owners of small- and medium-sized businesses hit by the pandemic.

Written by AP's Danica Cotto.