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Bryan Considering Nighttime Curfew, Shuts Down Nightclubs From Thursday For Entire Holiday Season and Bars Beginning Dec. 25; Universal Mask Wearing to be Enforced

Coronavirus / **Published On December 14, 2020 02:39 PM /**

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Drinks at a bar during the Covid-19 era. By. GETTY IMAGES

Governor Albert Bryan during his coronavirus response update Monday said his administration has been considering a nighttime curfew in an effort to curtail the surging cases of Covid-19 in the USVI, a statement that comes as the Dept. of Health reported 179 active cases as of Monday, 87 of which have been reported on St. Croix.

"Our neighbors in Puerto Rico and in the BVI have imposed curfews in attempts to contain the spread of the virus. The USVI Covid Task Force has begun the discussions about the implementation of a curfew to curtail nighttime activities and think about how we can stop people from gathering," Mr. Bryan said. He said D.O.H. over the weekend was performing random testing and found five individuals "out having a good time" who tested positive for the deadly disease.

"I want everyone within the sound of my voice to know that I am perhaps the one person standing between you and a solid curfew for the Virgin Islands," the governor made known, suggesting that pressure was coming from the task force to place time limits on when Virgin Islanders can be out in the public. Mr. Bryan has such authority at his disposal because of the state of emergency declaration that provides a vast array of powers to the executive branch of government.

The governor also announced that beginning Thursday at 5:00 p.m., nightclubs in the territory will be closed for the entire holiday season, and bars beginning Dec. 25 for two weeks — reopening January 8.

"This time there will be no excuses of serving food or what not. We cannot have a repeat of Thanksgiving for the next two weeks of Christmas," the territory's leader said. He said the administration in the past wanted to give people a sense of normalcy by resisting stricter controls. However, such thinking stood the chance of disguising the reality of Covid-19. "Now is not the time to be partying and having a good time in bars and nightclubs. We need to stay focused on the realization that this virus is rampant in our community and it is taking a toll on us all."

Additionally, Mr. Bryan reminded Virgin Islanders that there is currently an order in place that mandates universal mask wearing in the territory. He said once you're out in public — not just inside a place of business — and cannot maintain a 6-foot distance from another individual, your mask needs to be on. The order simply means everyone should wear masks out in public, especially when moving because more than likely you will come into contact with other persons. Puerto Rico has as universal mask-wearing mandate [and a Sunday curfew](#).

In a brief telephone interview with the Consortium following the press event, Mr. Bryan said that in the past, the administration refrained from announcing the universal mask-wearing mandate, though it is part of the current executive order. But the latest surge in cases has changed his mind: "We didn't want to say universal mask wearing but we're saying it now. It's always been the case. We need to be universally masked."

The governor's tone was stern on Monday as he addressed the community, frustrated that Virgin Islanders, he said, continued to flout protocols and guidelines put in place by the Dept. of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He chastised those who ignored the guidelines and said the administration was working on a bill that would give officials the authority to fine residents who don't wear masks up to \$1,000. He also said that the task force would step up enforcement on property owners who facilitate parties. Charter boats on which masks are not worn will also be targeted, Mr. Bryan warned.

"I don't know what people are thinking. Parties in the middle of the night, charter activities — it just has to stop," the governor said, toning his voice to convey the seriousness of the matter. He also reminded Virgin Islanders that masks must be worn when standing in restaurants and when using restrooms.

"We can see the light at the end of the tunnel; the bad news is some of us may be dead before we come out the other side," Mr Bryan said straight-faced. "But not if we do what we're supposed to

do."

The governor referred to the current situation with Covid-19 surging in the USVI as a "mess," and pointed blame on Thanksgiving gatherings and a recent wedding where Virgin Islanders traveled to the U.S. mainland to attend, contracted the coronavirus and brought the pathogen to the territory — spreading the disease among family and friends.

"At least one wedding in Florida that we are tracking, there are already four individuals who have tested positive for Covid-19," Mr. Bryan said. "These are Virgin Islanders who have traveled abroad, contracted the virus, and have brought it back here to the Virgin Islands to their friends and family."

The governor added, "This in addition to all what we're dealing with coming out of the Thanksgiving holiday has created the mess that we're in now with 179 active cases that we know of.

"I know you all want to party and get together, but you all need to be afraid of catching this virus because certainly the person that don't survive may be you, your loved one, your family, your friend," Mr. Bryan advised. "I'm appealing to you today, please, stop trying to make sense out of nonsense. Wear your mask and do the things that you need to do to keep you, your friends and your family safe."

Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said the department was seeing increasing infections in the hospitality industry, churches and government agencies. Mr. Bryan, however, did not announce any curtailment for houses of worship.