

The Virgin Islands Consortium

975 Doses of Pfizer's Covid-19 Vaccine Arrives on St. Croix; Moderna's Vaccine Will Be in Territory Next Week

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Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine, now FDA-approved, needs to be stored at minus 70 Celsius and health care providers will need to store it either in dry ice for shorter periods or in specialized freezers. By. LEON NEAL / GETTY IMAGES (VIA NPR ILLINOIS)

The first of multiple Covid-19 vaccines arrived on St. Croix today, the V.I. Dept. of Health announced Monday night. During Governor Albert Bryan's weekly Covid-19 response update earlier in the day, it was also revealed that the Moderna vaccine will be in the USVI next week.

D.O.H. said it received 975 doses of the vaccine, which the health department said will allow providers to start Phase 1A vaccinations in both the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John district. This phase includes clinical healthcare staff, and residents and staff in long-term care facilities throughout the territory per Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations.

"As more vaccines are ordered and delivered on a weekly basis, populations in Phases 1B through 1C will begin and will cover first responders, persons with immunocompromised conditions and the 65 and older population. It is expected for the department to roll into subsequent phases on a frequent basis," D.O.H. said in its release.

The Pfizer vaccine is the first to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and is said to be the biggest vaccination effort in U.S. history, according to ABC News. While many health officials anticipate the American public will receive the vaccines wholeheartedly, several Americans and Virgin Islanders alike have vocalized their skepticism and worry about the shot.

Governor Bryan reassured the community that the vaccines have been tested and approved by the FDA and have also been approved for distribution by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). "I understand there is a trust factor involved when it pertains to vaccinations and other health initiatives, especially in communities of color such as ours," Mr. Bryan said.

For this reason, the governor has elected himself to publicly take the vaccine to demonstrate its safety and to hopefully earn the trust of fellow Virgin Islanders.

The governor highlighted that while the vaccines are positive news and, once taken, will certainly help flatten the curve of the virus, he wanted the public to understand that the Pfizer vaccine the territory will be receiving will require two doses in order to be effective, and even after persons have taken the vaccination, they must continue to wear a mask, continue social distance, and adhere to all of the existing guidelines put in place.

Ms. Encarnacion indicated in her report that receiving the vaccines is a major breakthrough for the territory. "It's going to go really fast," said Ms. Encarnacion referring to the delivery of the vaccines, adding that the Moderna vaccine is close to receiving FDA approval for emergency use, and orders have already been submitted for the territory.

According to the health commissioner, the advisory committee on immunization practices met on Saturday to establish recommendations for the use of the Pfizer vaccine. She said since the meeting, health care providers across the territory have been provided with information on handling and administering. Ms. Encarnacion stated that the clinical staff met twice this week and has solicited 25 providers and are looking toward receiving a total of 30 providers around the territory. "We've gotten great response," she said.

The commissioner mentioned that several calls had been arranged this week through clinician outreach and communication activity, along with training sessions directly with Pfizer for the proper handling and administration of the vaccination. "These schedules have been provided to all health care providers — even those not providing Covid vaccinations," Ms. Encarnacion said.

According to the commissioner, last week D.O.H. in partnership with its federal and local partners practiced their plans to distribute the vaccines throughout the territory using a "hub and spoke" approach.

This means Pfizer vaccines will be delivered to a storage hub where an ultra cold storage freezer is stationed and redistributed to selected clinical health care entities or "hubs" where vaccines will be given.

"The vaccine distribution drill was a success," she said, adding that the next step would include continued health care provider training by federal and Pfizer vaccine officials; finalizing the vaccination scheduling of targeted populations, confirming data reporting, and disseminating public information.

"The transportation and administration of vaccines is something we do weekly, monthly, annually. The only difference is this is the Covid-19 vaccine, and it requires a different storage area," Ms. Encarnacion said.