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Over 12,000 Vaccine Doses Have Been Administered in USVI, But Government Does Not Know How Many Virgin Islanders Actually Took the Shot

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Individuals line up at the V.I. Dept. of Health on St. Croix to receive Covid-19 vaccination shot.

The Bryan administration on Monday announced that 12,094 vaccinations, including 2,967 second doses, were administered in the U.S. Virgin Islands as of Monday. The figure represents more than 10 percent of the 110,000-strong USVI population, and appears to [fall in line with vaccination speed on the U.S. mainland.](#)

But the USVI vaccination numbers are distorted as the territory has been affected by what is known as vaccine tourism, where Americans and other nationals, including tourists on yachts,

visit the U.S. Virgin Islands to get vaccinated and leave.

The vaccine tourism situation has been witnessed by many locals, some of whom have [documented their experience on social media](#). A Consortium reader, who was set to receive her second vaccine dose last week, heard a couple immediately behind her in a line state that they visited the territory just to get their second shot and leave. This couple had visited the USVI for Christmas and received the first dose then. They expressed while in the line that they were pleased because it was "impossible" to receive the vaccine on the mainland. The couple said they would leave the following day.

Governor Albert Bryan said the government cannot stop vaccine tourism, and fell in line with the Biden administration's policy to vaccinate individuals regardless of nationality or citizenship. Asked by the Consortium whether the territory had a database indicating how many Virgin Islanders actually took the vaccine, Mr. Bryan said, "There's no residency requirement on the form when you're doing this so it would be very difficult to do."

He added, "What we don't want to do is we don't want to set up barriers to inoculation. You want, whether you're a resident, non-resident, whether you're an illegal in the country, that you don't have a barrier to getting your vaccine. Because if we have Haitians, for example, that are in the Virgin Islands maybe illegally or undocumented, we don't want to have 2,000 people running around who are not taking the vaccine and then get sick. Because whether you're here on vacation or you came illegally or you're a resident, once you get sick we only have one hospital and we're going to be the ones to have to take care of you, so our priority here is to make sure everybody gets inoculated and there are no barriers to that vaccination which I think the president has expressed as well."

Mr. Bryan indicated that individuals would need to show some form of ID before receiving a vaccine shot, but it appears the administration hadn't setup a system that would separate Virgin Islanders from others. This poses a problem to actually determine how many Virgin Islanders are being vaccinated — an important metric that would determine how the USVI moves forward in terms of easing restrictions and getting back to some form of normalcy.

Relative to the vaccine tourism matter, V.I. Dept. of Health Medical Director, Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar, stated that the department would ascertain that all Virgin Islanders receive the opportunity to get vaccinated. "We are committed to ensuring that 100 percent of residents are offered the opportunity to be vaccinated and continue to work with vaccinating providers to discourage trips to the territory solely for the purpose of immunization," she said.

Some states are beginning to require proof of residency before administering vaccine doses. Rick Scott, a junior U.S. senator from the state of Florida, tweeted in January a picture showing foreign nationals, many of them Canadian, receiving Covid-19 vaccine shots in the state, many times ahead of state residents. "This is deeply concerning. Vaccines must go first to Floridians, starting with our health care and front line workers and most vulnerable populations," he [said](#).

Late January, the Miami Herald reported that Florida's largest public hospital system, Jackson Health System, would require proof of U.S. residency for patients who want to receive a Covid-19 vaccine, a change in policy that follows angry backlash from frustrated Miami-Dade residents, [according to the publication](#).

Kentucky recently [updated its vaccine eligibility guideline](#) to include only residents or individuals providing health care services to patients in Kentucky.

The Delaware Department of Health has stated, “Out-of-state residents must show proof of employment or proof that they access their health care here (for instance your primary care doctor or pharmacy is here) in order to get vaccinated in Delaware.”

Other states have been more lenient. According to CBS Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Department of Health said earlier this month, “You can cross county or state lines to receive a vaccine. An individual does not need to show proof of residency.”

In New Jersey, the Department of Health stated, “Vaccine sites can ask individuals to verbally verify that he/she lives, works, or is being educated in New Jersey, but proof of residency is not required. You can get a vaccine at a site outside of your home county.”

Covid-19 by the numbers in the USVI:

- The territory’s weekly positivity rate is 2.3 percent.
- The USVI was tracking 71 active cases as of Monday.
- 43,160 individuals tested to date (more than 40% of the population).
- 40,590 of those tests were negative.
- 2,466 tests came back positive.
- 2,371 people tested since March have recovered.
- 24 fatalities to date.
- One COVID-19 patient is hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- Four COVID-19 patients are hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.