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St. John Residents Flock to Vaccination Site to Get Vaccine Shot

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Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, D.O.H. Asst. Commish greets Joseph Zachary outside the Morris DeCastro Clinic in Cruz Bay before Zachary received his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

ST. JOHN — A whole community effort led to 155 Covid-19 vaccine dosages administered at the Morris de Castro Clinic in Cruz Bay on Saturday, March 20, announced the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Logistical precision between federal and territorial partners ensured vaccine doses crossed the Pillsbury Sound from Red Hook on St. Thomas to St. John and got into arms, FEMA said.

According to the release, successful planning led to the proper storage and handling of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and the delivery of medical supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), tables and chairs, safety cones and signs to the Morris de Castro Clinic. The V.I. National Guard (VING) delivered 25 vials of vaccine to St. John and the V.I. Department of Health (VIDOH) and V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) ensured laptops were at the clinic to track vaccine dosages through the Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS).

"Team members of the Virgin Islands Department of Health including Assistant Commissioner Nicole Craigwell-Syms, Ph.D. led the way with the "Boots on the Ground" approach for educating St. John's residents on the importance of receiving the COVID-19 Vaccine. An appointment list of 60 quickly increased because of the team approach we have supported since the beginning of the pandemic. I am proud of the small team we have at the Morris de Castro Clinic under leadership of Aliah Lockhart," said Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. She said the pop-up Vaccine Clinic on St. John is only one of many planned to increase immunity in the territory and in particular our beautiful island of St. John.

"The collaborative efforts amongst our local and federal partners is hard to describe as we have forged a bond with the goal of vaccinating 50,000 unique Virgin Islands residents by July 1, 2021," the commissioner added.

The Department of Defense provided clinical support with two physicians, two pharmacists, two medical supply, and seven vaccinators at the Cruz Bay vaccination center. "After three weeks administering COVID vaccinations at the University of Virgin Islands, a contingent of our medical vaccination team supported by Virgin Islands National Guardsmen held its first vaccination clinic in St. John at the de Castro Clinic. Applying the same process and procedures, the team did a fantastic job to administer 155 immunizations in about four hours. The close coordination and teamwork between the Department of Health, VITEMA, FEMA, and Love City Strong volunteers, ensured the operation was a success," said CDR. Scott Farr, (U.S. Coast Guard) Title 10 Deputy to the Virgin Islands Dual Status Commander.

The Cruz Bay vaccination center's operations received support from 11 members of the V.I. National Guard as well.

"Our uniformed members work daily with our civilian counterparts to plan, sustain, and lead efforts to reduce the spread of this pandemic within our Territory," said Brig. Gen. Kodjo Knox-Limbacker, the adjutant general of the Virgin Islands National Guard.

"These efforts bring us closer to Gov. Albert Bryan Jr.'s goal of 50,000 shots in arms by July 1, 2021. I continue to be very proud of our military men and women's level of performance under the leadership of Dual Status Commander, Col. Sally F. Petty."

Community support from Love City Strong (LCS), a St. John-based nonprofit focused on disaster preparedness and response, also assisted at the event. Through community outreach, LCS helped residents register for appointments and ensured chairs, tables, and tents were in place at the de Castro Clinic, according to the release.

"Love City Strong's service to the community is rooted in the idea of public private partnerships. Our priority is to support equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccines, and we're proud to be a part of this joint effort with our federal and territorial partners" said LCS' Executive Director Meaghan Enright.

FEMA said it and the territory are ensuring equitable vaccine access for individuals with disabilities. Accessibility for individuals with functional needs is also available at the St. John vaccination center. Language translation is available through a translation phone line, and sign language interpretation is available through Video Remote Interpretation (VRI).

Sign language interpretation and language translation is available at the territory's two CVCs on St. Croix and St. Thomas as well.

“The laser-like focus on equity between the federal government and the territory ensures all Virgin Islanders who are eligible can get vaccinated against COVID-19. FEMA will continue to provide the U.S. Virgin Islands with logistical and financial resources through a unified effort with our federal and territorial partners to defeat COVID-19. The Saturday vaccination outreach on St. John exemplifies a whole community response to the coronavirus pandemic,” said Deputy Federal Coordinating Officer John Covell.

The St. John pop-up vaccination center will be open Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon, the St. Croix CVC at the Great Hall on the University of the Virgin Islands' (UVI) campus is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and the St. Thomas CVC at UVI's Sports & Fitness Center is open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Virgin Islanders who meet current criteria can be vaccinated regardless of citizenship status, disability or employer and vaccines are provided free of charge. Call 340-777-8227 to schedule a vaccination appointment or book an appointment through the Department of Health's COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling Gateway at <https://www.covid19.usvi.care/vaccines> .

Visit <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/vaccine-support#equity> to learn how FEMA is committed to ensuring every person who wants a vaccine can get one. Information on how to distinguish between rumors and facts regarding response to the pandemic is available for review at <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/rumor-control>