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# Now is Not the Time to Lower Your Guard, Health Commissioner Says, Pointing to Covid Variants

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Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion on Sunday told the Consortium that Virgin Islanders should not lower their guards relative to Covid-19, pointing to variants proven to be more viral that are circulating on the U.S. mainland and recently detected in Puerto Rico. She said no variants have been detected in the USVI, however residents need to continue following guidelines.

Those responses came following a question about herd immunity and a projection on when easing of restrictions would become a reality. Ms. Encarnacion also clarified that the 25,000 mark reached in Covid-19 vaccinations represented first-dose recipients, meaning those persons have not been fully vaccinated. She said just under 10,000 people have been fully vaccinated to date in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I don't care where you actually listen to it, CDC as well as the states — and those that are relaxing are regretting it — but everyone basically says this is not the time to lower your guard," Ms. Encarnacion said. The commissioner said she heard a commercial on Saturday that said, 'this is not the time to lower your guard or your mask', which she appeared to suggest was a solid message.

D.O.H. Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis said last week when asked about the USVI achieving herd immunity: "We will know when we get there," adding that herd immunity, which translates to about 60 percent of the population being vaccinated, would lead to a dip in cases and the positivity rate.

Texas, which made headlines after easing all Covid-19 restrictions and essentially opening up the state to its pre-pandemic status three weeks ago, has so far not witnessed a surge in new cases, with reported infections continuing to decline statewide, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Ms. Encarnacion stressed that while new variants as of Sunday had not been identified in the USVI, "at the same time you don't want it to happen because we've been careless. So it's very difficult to say," she said, referring to a projection on when restrictions would be eased.

As of Friday, the USVI had 55 active cases: 29 on St. Croix, 20 on St. Thomas and 9 on St. John.

In a release issued Saturday, D.O.H. touted the 25,000 covid vaccination mark, though the department was not initially clear on whether those were first or second dose vaccinations, which represents a significant difference as persons are not considered fully vaccinated for the Pfizer or Moderna Covid-19 shots until they have received two doses. According to Ms. Encarnacion, appointments for a second shot for the Pfizer vaccine is set twenty-one days following the first dose, and twenty-eight days following the first dose for the Moderna shot.