

Church Congregation, Private Parties Led to Sharp Increase in Covid-19 Cases in St. Thomas, Health Commissioner Says

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Kyle Murphy **May 10, 2021**

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V.I. Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion made known Monday that a “dramatic uptick” in Covid-19 cases has been affecting St. Thomas over the past week, bringing the positivity rate to 3.33 percent compared to 1.86 percent last week. As of Monday there were 94 active cases in the territory, 16 of which were registered on St Croix, 77 on St. Thomas and 1 on St. John.

The commissioner said the increase in cases was connected to a church congregation and carnival-weekend parties in St. Thomas – parties she said were organized despite Governor Albert Bryan's orders against them. While entertainment events such as parties have been discouraged, Mr. Bryan in March [allowed up to 200 persons](#) to attend a church service if the aforesaid amount is 50

percent or less of the church's capacity.

“The most recent surge seen on St. Thomas is among unvaccinated individuals and was determined to be a cluster-related incident and the more widespread disease is likely due to recent private functions and parties against the governor's orders,” she said. “It is unfortunate that we are seeing this trend since the vaccine is widely available and easily accessible.”

Relative to the church cluster, the commissioner said the department had tested 50 percent of the congregation and would continue to take preventative action to mitigate spread.

Vaccine Passport

Ms. Encarnacion spoke briefly about a Virtual Vaccine Passport “being developed for use in public and for travel, in lieu of testing.” Until the passport is developed, vaccinated Covid-19 travelers still have to upload a valid negative PCR or positive antibody test to the travel portal before entering the USVI. She said the Covid-19 passport could be used for events similar to the “One Night, One Fete” Division of Festivals event recently held.

Vaccination Centers

The vaccination centers have moved from U.V.I. on both islands. The new locations are the Nissan Center on St. Croix and the Community Health Clinic on the second floor of the Schneider Hospital on St. Thomas. All three vaccines, Pfizer, Moderna and Janssen, are being offered in the territory.

There are no hospitalizations on St. Croix and three in St. Thomas, though none of those patients on ventilator machines.

People can report suspected cases of Covid-19 by calling the Department of Health hotline at 340-712-6299 on St. Croix, and 340-776-1519 on St. Thomas and St. John.