

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Will be Among Last Jurisdictions to Lift Mask Mandate, Bryan Says

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Ernice Gilbert **May 18, 2021**



A couple on vacation taking a selfie while wearing masks. Governor Bryan said Monday the USVI will be among the last jurisdictions to no longer require masks — even for vaccinated individuals. By. GETTY IMAGES

While a growing list of states have adjusted their mask mandates to reflect the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's decision to ease restrictions for vaccinated people, Governor Albert Bryan said Monday that not only will the U.S. Virgin Islands' mask mandate remain in place, the territory will be among the last jurisdictions to lift its current No Mask, No Service policy.

Mr. Bryan pointed to what he said was the CDC's lack of guidance relative to how local and state governments should distinguish between persons who are vaccinated and those who are not. And he said more Virgin Islanders must be vaccinated — even beyond the governor's goal of 50,000 complete vaccinations by July — before lifting the current protocol.

"Removing the masking requirements and simply relying on the honor policy at this point is not something we think will protect our community against the spread of the virus," Mr. Bryan said. He added that the majority of people "that call this territory home... have not been vaccinated." He said the territory as of Monday was at 49 percent of persons who had received one Covid-19 vaccine dose, and a lower percentage of those fully vaccinated against the virus. According to Dr. Esther Ellis, V.I. Dept. of Health territorial epidemiologist, 30,109 Virgin Islanders were fully vaccinated as of Monday, while an additional 39,171 persons had received a first dose, which equates to 49.3 percent of the population being fully vaccinated. Combined, a total of 69,280 persons have received either the first or second shot of a Covid-19 vaccine in the territory.

"We're making progress toward our goal of vaccinating 50,000 Virgin Islanders, but we still have a long way to go in achieving the herd immunity that we know will keep our community safe," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "Even when we hit 50,000 we will still need more. We cannot afford to take any steps backward on our path to normalcy."

Mr. Bryan said during the Q&A segment of the press briefing Monday that "we were the first and will probably be the last" to lift the mask mandate. He added, "It can't hurt. Most of the people have gotten used to wearing their mask. When I talk to residents, they don't have a real problem with masks."

"We don't have a problem arresting people; we've been doing a good job at that... So if we've got to arrest tourists coming here because they won't wear their masks, or have disorderly conduct at our hotels, beaches or any place else, so be it," the governor said.

The CDC [said last week](#) said that fully vaccinated people didn't need to wear mask or social distance inside or outside, in small or large settings. They should, however, continue to wear mask when on a plane, train, or bus, and the guidance does not apply to facilities such as hospitals, prisons and nursing homes, the health agency said.