

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Says Administration Will Not Mandate Covid Vaccination For Public Schools

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Public schools in the USVI will reopen on August 9. Governor Albert Bryan on Monday said his administration isn't mandating Covid vaccination as a requirement for students or staff. By. GETTY IMAGES

Governor Albert Bryan said Monday his administration would not mandate Covid-19 vaccination for public schools, a response provided to the Consortium during the administration's weekly Covid press briefing.

"We're not going to impose a mandatory immunization for our employees nor for students," the governor said. Public schools are scheduled to reopen to in-person

learning [on August 9](#).

Mr. Bryan's comments follow a University of the Virgin Islands [announcement](#) Monday that it would mandate Covid vaccination for staff, faculty and students. The Consortium heard about the mandate over the weekend and requested comment from the university. UVI said the decision was made during a June 19 board meeting, but in a release [providing details of the same board meeting](#), the institution left out what was arguably one of the most consequential and important actions of the meeting.

Calls placed to Tamika Thomas, head of communications at UVI, were not immediately returned.

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), citing Dorit Rubinstein Reiss, a public-health law professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law, schools and school districts generally don't have the authority to mandate student vaccines.

But other authorities can: namely, state legislatures or health officials acting under legislative authority, according to Reiss.

Governor Bryan pointed out that immunizations have always been a part of school registration, but said Covid vaccination would not be mandated. Relative to UVI, the governor said the university's board thought mandatory Covid vaccination was a prudent action to help protect its faculty, staff and students.

"The UVI board has taken a position that they want to make sure that their campus is safe and they want to make sure that their faculty and their students are able to be responsive and come to learn, so they took that position. We'll see how that works out," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "Public schools are not optional, you have to be in school. You don't have a right to go to a university, it's a privilege so they can make those types of decisions and what is best for their faculty, staff and students.

The Consortium pointed out that UVI receives annual allotments from taxpayers of roughly \$30 million, and in the fiscal year 2020 budget received \$34.6 million, according to the Office of Management and Budget's [latest budget proposal](#). In response, Mr. Bryan said, "Yes, so are the schools," though it was not quite clear what the governor was relaying since he'd previously stated that public schools are optional while attending UVI is a privilege.

UVI announced Monday that after much discussion and debate, and in consultation with the V.I. Department of Health, the UVI Board of Trustees voted on Saturday, June 19, to institute mandatory vaccinations for all students and employees.

"This decision was made based on what the Board felt was in the best interest of the entire UVI community," said UVI President Dr. David Hall. "Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on this nation and the world. This virus can be fatal and we have seen those consequences."

Mr. Hall continued, "Though there are numerous ways in which individuals can protect themselves from the virus, the best scientific evidence demonstrates that the various vaccines are the best protection for individuals and communities."

UVI said it will provide in the near future the method and procedure for compliance with the policy. This method will be provided in conjunction with the V.I. Dept. of Health.