

The Virgin Islands Consortium

12 People Have Died in BVI From Covid in Less Than Two Weeks as Surge Continues; Health Authorities See Sign of Hope

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TORTOLA BVI — Total Covid-related deaths in the British Virgin Islands jumped [from eight](#) to thirteen in one day, as the deadliest surge the BVI has experienced continues to impact the territory. BVI officials held a briefing Friday night that included Premier Andrew Fahie, Acting BVI Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ronald Georges and other top health officials.

Mr. Fahie called for residents to continue praying as he took a moment of silence for those who have died. He then turned to faith, stating, "We are a praying people; it is customary for us to individually and collectively petition God to protect us from the plans

of the enemy both in the spiritual and natural realms." But he stressed BVI residents must do their part in following safety protocols and take a Covid-19 vaccine.

The government said it would renew its curfew order for an additional fourteen days from 7:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. effective July 23rd. The BVI cabinet ordered that residents should work from home where possible, and stay home unless for purposes of work and to conduct business, or to become vaccinated, along with other approved activities.

Dr. Georges said health authorities have been conducting the most aggressive testing and contact tracing effort in the BVI to date, with 700-800 people being tested everyday. Last Saturday, 1,200 people were tested, he revealed.

But even as positive cases are at the highest levels since the onset of the pandemic, Dr. Georges said there was some hope as the numbers were beginning to level off. He said Friday was the first day the BVI experienced a dip in active cases since the latest surge started earlier this month, with active cases going from 1,602 to 1,596. "That is because we had 34 new cases identified and 35 new recoveries," he said. "And unfortunately we had some deaths." Dr. Georges said a lot of the BVI cases are asymptomatic.

On the deaths so far, Dr. Georges stated, "Unfortunately for us the statistics are playing out as they have been playing out all over the world. The Virgin Islands is no different to India, no different to people from China, no different to people from Italy, the US, or the UK. Covid is a serious condition and persons who have severe disease from Covid, they have just that, a severe disease. So even though a large proportion of persons will have no symptoms or mild symptoms and recover quite uneventfully, there are those who will have much more severe symptoms and will be hospitalized, [will receive] ICU treatment and unfortunately some may also die."

Most of the severe cases in the BVI are obese, some morbidly obese and most of them have chronic diseases, according to Dr. Georges. He also revealed that most of the severe cases have been individuals with diabetes and hypertension. A few of the cases have chronic lung conditions. "Based on the international evidence, these are all very high-risk factors for mortality, and this is what is bearing out in the Virgin Islands."

He urged residents who are experiencing symptoms to call health services for help. For those in severe distress, he encouraged calling 911 instead of staying home and attempting to fight the virus on their own.

BVI Vaccination

So far 10,439 BVI residents have been fully vaccinated, while 14,208 people have received one dose. The BVI's total population is roughly 30,000.

"Over 99.5 percent of all deaths worldwide have been among the unvaccinated," Dr. Georges said, as he called for individuals to be vaccinated. The British territory has organized vaccination drives Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Festival Grounds in Tortola.

He encouraged residents to adhere to the stay-at-home order, and said that he visited downtown Tortola recently and witnessed residents in the streets as if it were normal times in the BVI.

"If we are to deal with this Covid pandemic and this Covid outbreak in the Virgin Islands, it is imperative for us to adhere to the public health guidance," Dr. Georges said. "This is the only way we are going to get through this."

The Delta variant is suspected but data collected have not been conclusive, Dr. Georges stated.

Twenty-seven people as of Friday were hospitalized at the BVI hospital for Covid, sixteen of whom were already admitted in the "Covid ward" and nine in the emergency room awaiting beds, according to BVI Acting Health Service Authority Director Cedorene Malone-Smith. She said four patients were in the Intensive Care Unit, and an additional two on ventilators.

"We had twelve deaths in the last week and a half," said Mrs. Malone-Smith, who also stated that eleven patients have been discharged since the surge. Of the twelve individuals who died, none were vaccinated, and none of the 27 patients currently in the Covid ward at the hospital are vaccinated, she said.

"It's the worst feeling in the world for me to see a 31-year-old and a 36-year-old die for the want of a free vaccine that we were offering," Mrs. Malone-Smith said as she stressed the value of getting vaccinated.

Mrs. Malone-Smith said the current situation in the BVI has affected employee morale at the hospital. She said some members of the hospital's staff have experienced breakdown and burnout, adding that they are not used to seeing so many deaths in such a short period of time.

But the work goes on, Mrs. Malone-Smith added. "We are not one of those teams that can say that we're going to work from home; we haven't discovered that magic yet," she said.