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Three People Between 39-49 Years Old are the Latest to Die of Covid in BVI, Driving Up Territory's Two-Week Total to 16

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BVI on Saturday and Sunday, July 17th and 18th 2021, hosted vaccination drives at the Festival Grounds in Tortola as the British territory experiences its worst Covid surge yet. By. GOVERNMENT OF THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

TORTOLA, BVI — Sixteen people have died from Covid-19 in the British Virgin Islands in the last two weeks, as what health officials suspect to be the Delta variant rips through the small territory of 30,000 residents. The latest deaths — all male victims ages 39, 45 and 49 — died Saturday at the Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital in Tortola, and carried total deaths for the entire pandemic to 17.

BVI Minister for Health and Social Development Carvin Malone vowed on behalf of the government to get the matter under control. "We will spare no cost, no effort or no time to get whatever we need to stabilize this condition and return to the [British] Virgin Islands that we know, the Virgin Islands that we love," Mr. Malone said Sunday.

The government on Saturday and Sunday held all-day vaccination drives at the Festival Grounds in Tortola, and reports suggest turnout was strong with 432 people taking the shot on Saturday, according to Mr. Malone. The BVI government has been providing its residents with the AstraZeneca vaccine, which has been linked to causing blood clots in a small number of recipients. According to the Wall Street Journal, citing U.K. and European tallies of cases, the risks of clotting combined with low blood platelets—a rare condition termed vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia, or VITT—following the AstraZeneca shot are roughly 1 to 2 per 100,000 vaccinations.

Of the 432 individuals who took an AstraZeneca shot on Saturday, 357 were first-dose recipients while 75 were second-dose shots, according to Mr. Malone, who thanked the U.K. government for providing the vaccine doses.

The latest vaccinations carried the BVI's total to date to 10,514 complete vaccinations, while 14,565 people have received one dose. The BVI's total population is roughly 30,000.

BVI health officials have said they believe the Delta variant has been circulating in the territory, though they have not offered conclusive evidence. On Saturday night, the USVI Dept. of Health said [it suspected twelve Covid samples to be the Delta variant](#), with full sequencing results expected from Yale University — D.O.H.'s partner in determining Covid variants — sometime this week.

Governor Albert Bryan announced during a press briefing Thursday that effective Monday, anyone entering the USVI from the BVI [must submit a negative Covid test within 24 hours of departure](#). USVI Health officials will also accept positive antibody tests. "We're going to be taking extra caution, and please don't try to game the system. We've already made one arrest and we'll make others for people trying to forge their way into the U.S. Virgin Islands," the governor said.

The governor also offered free vaccinations to "anyone who makes it to our shores."

Mr. Bryan said the administration gave thought to reducing the ferry load coming from the BVI, "but we thought better of it because all the people who are coming should have had a test within 48 hours of their departure," he explained.

For Virgin Islanders wanting to travel to the BVI, Mr. Bryan said, "We're not encouraging people to go over to that situation."

Twenty-seven people as of Friday were hospitalized in the BVI 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. It is possible that some of those patients were among the recently announced deceased; BVI numbers relative to hospitalization are not detailed to show recent admissions, [only totals from the beginning of the pandemic](#), making it hard to say how many people are currently at the hospital unless new information is provided by health officials.

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