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USVI Covid Cases Climb to 157; Hospitalizations Rise to Highest Level Since Start of Pandemic; Lockdowns Could Return If Numbers Increase, Bryan Says

Coronavirus / **Published On July 19, 2021 04:52 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **July 19, 2021**

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Logo of the Juan F. Luis Hospital, where five Covid patients are currently hospitalized, with at least one ventilated. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan said Monday that the sixteen Covid-related hospitalizations announced by health officials today — up from fifteen on Sunday — represent the highest number of hospitalizations since the pandemic began in March 2020. He urged residents to take utmost precaution and to get vaccinated to prevent a greater surge.

Conveying the seriousness of the current increase in cases, V.I. Dept. of Health Territorial Epidemiologist, Dr. Esther Ellis, stated, "In the past week there has been a record 161 new

infections — the highest new infections for a week in 2021 thus far."

She added, "That's not a record we want to be making."

As of Monday there were 157 active Covid-19 cases territory-wide, seventy on St. Croix, eighty-one on St. Thomas and two on St. John. The territory's positivity rate climbed to 4.5 percent from 3.5 percent last week, according to Dr. Ellis.

The sixteen hospitalizations include five on St. Croix and eleven on St. Thomas. On Sunday, V.I. Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion told the Consortium there would be more deaths and hospitalizations if the territory had not been utilizing monoclonal antibody (MAB) treatments on patients, which has been proven to help severely ill Covid patients recover. The Schneider Regional Medical Center has administered 203 MAB treatments to date, while the Juan F. Luis Hospital has administered forty-three, according to the health commissioner.

Of the sixteen people hospitalized, three were on ventilators: two on St. Thomas and one on St. Croix, Ms. Encarnacion made known.

Governor Bryan encouraged residents to take precautions and follow Covid guidelines. He also pushed hard for vaccination, and said if Covid-19 numbers remain elevated, restrictions would be reintroduced, among them a decrease in capacity for gatherings.

Currently, 48.1 percent of the USVI population has been inoculated against Covid, which equates to 38,220 residents. D.O.H. said 70 percent of the population needs to be vaccinated in order to achieve herd immunity.

Mr. Bryan also said the Covid-19 Task Force will be stricter in enforcing rules. He said the administration has worked with the public, including owners of establishments such as bars and restaurants to be more lenient when Covid numbers are trending lower. However, with the positive cases rising and the Delta variant suspected to be afoot in the territory, leniency is being abandoned — at least for now — for more active enforcement, according to the governor.

\$200,000 Given to Covid Lottery Winners

The administration also announced the winners of the first "Vax-to-Win" lottery drawing, an initiative aimed at encouraging people to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

The winners were announced as Grethel Smith from the District of St. Croix, who won \$100,000, and Ronald Mosholder from the St. Thomas-St. John District, who also won \$100,000.

The drawings are conducted by the V.I. Lottery, which was present at Gov't House Monday to make the announcement.

"Now you see... you could win too," Mr. Bryan said following the announcement. "All you've got to do is go get that vaccine today. If you got it already, all the better, you're in the roll to win. Every week now for the next ten weeks we'll be rolling out that winner and telling you who that is."

