

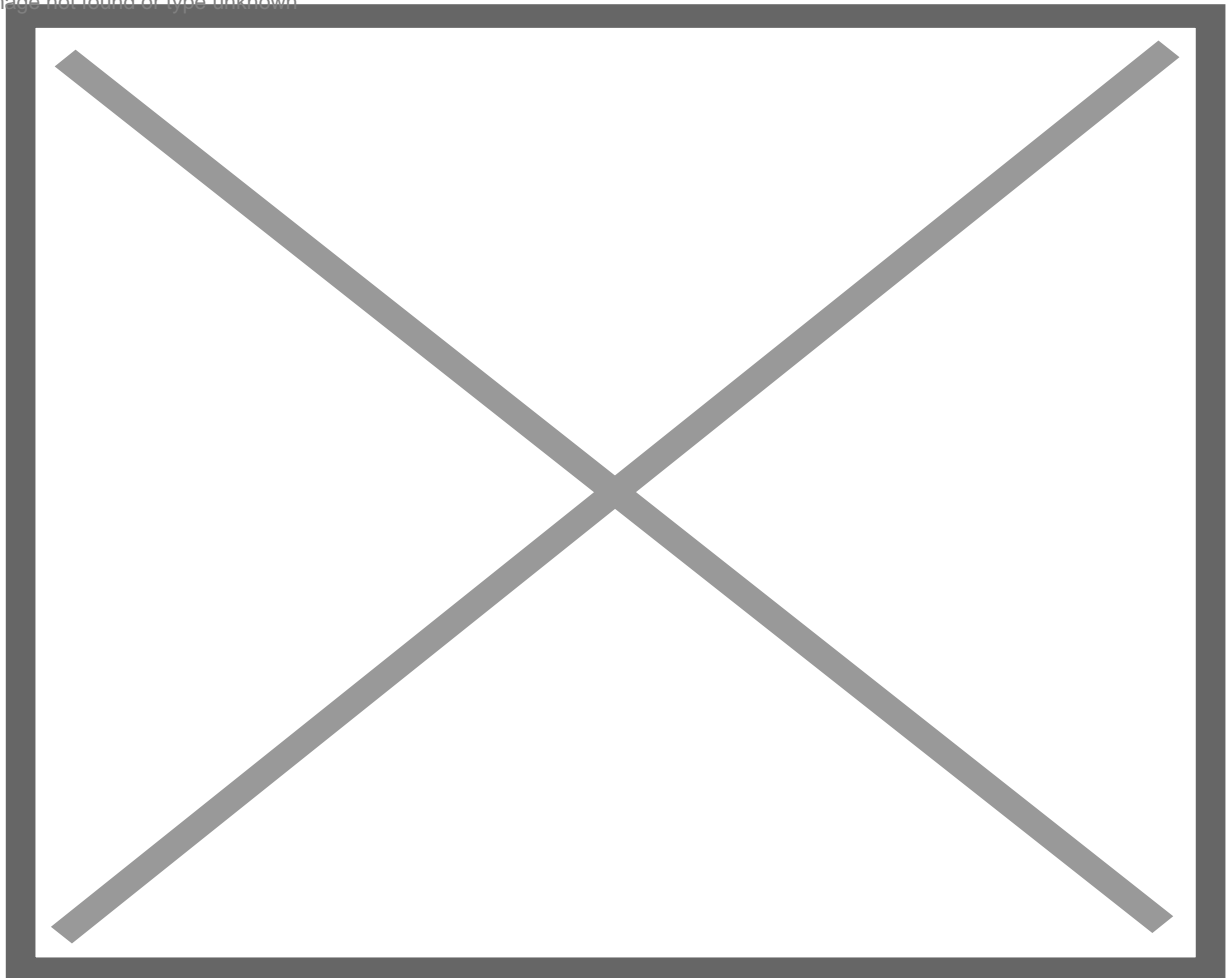
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BVI Covid Deaths Climb to 25 as Eight More People Die; 35 Currently Hospitalized; 'We Have to Blame Ourselves, Not Variant,' Chief Medical Officer Says

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Ernice Gilbert **July 24, 2021**

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TORTOLA, BVI — The government of the British Virgin Islands on Friday night shared that eight more people have died from Covid-19, carrying the BVI's total cases to twenty-five from seventeen in one week.

The information was provided by BVI Minister for Health and Social Development Carvin Malone, who described the current situation in the British territory as painful.

BVI Health Services Authority Acting Chief Medical Officer, Cedorene Malone-Smith, said thirty-two patients were hospitalized as of Friday, including sixteen in the special care nursery, six in the emergency room, six in the intensive care unit, two in the behavioral health unit, and two in

the OB/ maternity inpatient services. "We've had two moms-to-be that came in and they're Covid positive, and we're managing that," she said.

Patients who have been discharged as of Friday totaled twenty-five. Ages of admitted patients currently hospitalized range from 16-94, according to Mrs. Malone-Smith.

"When we talk about vaccination, I ask my staff at this point if you're going to be vaccinated, don't do it for yourself, this is where you do it for your grandma, the 94-year-old. This is where you do it for your children, the 16-year-old. Those folks are now in the hospital unvaccinated and positive, so yes I continue to be a proponent of the vaccination process," she said.

Regarding the twenty-five Covid deaths to date, Mrs. Malone-Smith stated, "That is a number we didn't want to see, but it's here."

Acting Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ronald Georges, said the current surge that started around June 29 appears to have peaked on July 19, though he urged strict adherence to safety guidelines put in place by the government.

Dr. Georges also said Covid samples sent to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) in Trinidad for sequencing did not return positive as the Delta variant. Instead, Dr. Georges said the current surge was caused by BVI residents and the flouting of Covid guidelines.

"We had quite a few mass gatherings," he said, adding that there were "quite a few parties," among other activities. "And just from the pictures on social media, we are quite aware that there was not a lot of mask-wearing, not a lot of social distancing, and not a lot of hand-washing, etc.

"So during that time we were able to have sufficient contacts with persons to cause this explosion in cases in the BVI without a new variant. So we can't blame a new variant, we have to blame ourselves," Dr. Georges said.

Even so, the British territory is now experiencing a dip in cases, which Mr. Malone, the health minister, revealed earlier had dropped from 1,600 to 1,109 as people start to recover. The BVI has been performing between 600-800 Covid-19 tests per day since the beginning of the current surge.

Dr. Georges spent a considerable amount of time talking about personal responsibility and the need to take the Covid matter seriously. He said the government has moved away from hard lockdowns because of some of the issues the action has caused both socially and economically. Instead, the government has been encouraging personal responsibility.

Dr. Georges described personal responsibility as being "very, very important for us to essentially recover from what is happening now, to ensure we don't have secondary spikes, and also to ensure that we come out of this in a good state."

He reminded that vaccination removes individuals from that pool of susceptible persons who can become infected. "That is very important," he said. Dr. Georges said 3.7 billion vaccines have been administered worldwide as he attempted to counter vaccine hesitancy.

According to Mrs. Malone-Smith, seventy-five of the BVI hospital's 168 employees who were out of work because they were either ill with the virus or exposed to it, were back at the medical facility. Additionally, the USVI has helped the BVI by providing two individuals to assist with testing. Three ICU physicians from the U.S. will arrive in the BVI next week to provide more support.

Relative to vaccination, the BVI has experienced a marked increase in interest and has been vaccinating hundreds of individuals, with over 800 vaccine shots administered last Saturday and Sunday alone. Mr. Malone, the health minister, said the British territory will have vaccinated 53.4 percent of its population in the next two weeks when second-dose shots are administered. He then stated that the BVI needs to get to 75 percent vaccination to beat the virus.

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