

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Start of In-Person Learning May Be Delayed if Covid Continues to Escalate, Bryan Says as Active Infections Cross 200; Governor Says Cruise Ships Not the Problem, the Unvaccinated Are

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The territory's planned Aug. 9 reopening of public schools to in-person learning may be delayed if the current surge in Covid-19 in the U.S. Virgin Islands continues to escalate, said Governor Albert Bryan to the Consortium Saturday.

The administration is contemplating a delay because Covid-19 in the USVI has seen a marked increase in recent weeks, and confirmation of the Delta variant's presence has worsened the situation.

The Delta variant is a highly transmissible strain of Covid-19 that has also proven to be better at evading vaccines, though fully vaccinated people still have significant protection against illness.

Mr. Bryan said the administration has been "keeping a close eye on school," and that in-person learning may be delayed "if we keep escalating."

On Saturday, the V.I. Dept. of Health [reported](#) 208 active Covid-19 cases in the territory — up from 189 a day earlier — with 141 on St. Thomas, 61 on St. Croix and 6 on St. John. According to D.O.H., St. Croix had nineteen new cases between July 22-23, while St. Thomas had twenty during the same period. However, the Dept. of Health listed twenty individuals as recovered, leading to the adjusted number of 208 infections.

With growing concern in the community that the arrival of cruise ships [from July 5](#) may have contributed to the increase in cases, the Consortium sought comment from the governor on his administration's thinking on the matter. Mr. Bryan, pointing to a vaccination rate of 97 percent on cruise ships and mandatory testing for all passengers, indicated that cruise ships will continue to be welcomed in the USVI. On August 18, the Celebrity Equinox will call on St. Croix, marking the third arrival to the USVI (first on St. Croix) since the July 5 restart of cruise travel to the territory following a March 2020 No Sail Order by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Cruise ship [passengers are] 97 percent vaccinated," the governor said, adding that cruise tourism was not a factor. Instead, "unvaccinated is sole reason for surge," he said. "We could be back to normal if we get to 70 percent vaccinated."

The latest surge puts not only the reopening of in-person learning in jeopardy, but also the true start of the new normal, which will see the territory fully reopened to all activities that preceded Covid, though with new hygiene rules.

According to the Wall Street Journal, researchers in China reported in July that people infected with the Delta variant had about 1,000 times more viral particles in their respiratory tracts than those with the original strain. The researchers also reported that people become infectious sooner, according to the publication.

WSJ [further wrote](#) that Wendy Barclay, professor of virology at Imperial College London, says swab tests suggest that Delta infects people with a heavier virus load, which means they exhale more of it for others to catch. The mutations also appear to make the variant more effective at attaching itself to cells in human airways. The combination means that an infected person is, other things being equal, likely to infect more people and that people require less exposure to become infected.

"Scientists don't yet know if the Delta variant is deadlier than other variants, but a study published in the Lancet medical journal estimated that the risk of hospitalization after infection with Delta could be 85% higher than with Alpha," reads the report.

Governor Bryan in a video statement Friday night appeared somber as he [called on Virgin Islanders](#) to forsake mass gatherings, including steering clear of parties, beaches, clubs and bars this weekend as Covid-19 cases in the USVI grow and the presence of the Delta variant now confirmed. Mr. Bryan also stated that nineteen patients were hospitalized with the disease — the most since the onset of the pandemic in March

2020.

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