

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Three Inmates at Golden Grove Test Positive For Covid-19; B.O.C. Initiates Complete Lockdown

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Aerial shot of the Golden Grove Correctional Facility (John Bell Adult Correctional Facility) on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — The Bureau of Corrections on Wednesday afternoon announced that three inmates tested positive for Covid-19 at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility on St. Croix. The bureau said it learned Tuesday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. of the first incident after an inmate complained of mild flu-like symptoms.

"This was the first confirmed case of Covid- 19 infection at this BOC facility since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020," the bureau said.

In response, the bureau said it "immediately conducted Covid-19 testing of all inmates and some staff" at the prison, also known as the John Bell Adult Correctional Facility, and said it worked closely with the V.I. Dept. of Health to conduct a series of mass-testing for all other staff.

B.O.C. said it learned that two additional inmates tested positive for the virus that were housed in the same section as the first infected inmate. It said the inmates who tested positive were isolated and placed in a separate housing unit apart from the general prison population.

"None of the infected inmates have required hospitalization," B.O.C. said.

The affected inmates are being closely monitored by the B.O.C. nursing staff at Golden Grove, according to the bureau. Additionally, D.O.H. has submitted test samples for laboratory analysis to determine what strain of the Covid-19 virus caused the infections.

B.O.C. said it has notified the Covid-19 positive inmates and staff of their status and is working closely with D.O.H. and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct contact tracing to confirm the root cause of the outbreak.

Additionally, the entire facility has been placed on lockdown with continuous disinfectant and cleaning, according to the release. Inmate movement has been restricted within the facility. All visits by vendors and all inmate transfers have been suspended until further notice. In-person visits, work details, and prisoner furloughs remain suspended, as they have been since the start of the pandemic, the bureau said. Court hearings held virtually remain unaffected. Attorneys may visit with prisoners via secure video conference by contacting the facility to schedule a video visit.

The bureau said it has implemented mandatory temperature checks, pulse readings, hand sanitizer usage and continuous washing of hands at each facility along with the more recent addition of a thermal screening monitoring system for anyone (staff, inmates and guests). It said it has stockpiled sufficient personal protection equipment, such as N95 masks, face shields, gowns, gloves and Tyvex suits in preparation for any anticipated Covid-19 resurgence. In addition, the bureau said it has on hand negative pressure isolation tents which can be used to temporarily isolate any prisoner with an infectious disease. The bureau said it has placed additional masks in the inmate housing areas and has ramped up cleaning and sanitation within the facility.

The bureau said it was "one of the first correctional agencies nationwide to offer the Covid-19 vaccine to all inmates, regardless of age or underlying conditions."

Twenty-nine inmates, ranging in age from 20 to 66, have taken the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine since the roll out began on February 22, according to the release. The bureau did not provide inmate population data that would help determine the percentage of inmates who have taken the shot.

B.O.C. Director Wynn Testamark said that all medical and correctional staff are "capable professionals who continuously work hard to ensure the safety, security and custody of all inmates," according to the release.

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