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# Delta Variant Concern Prompts Bryan to Delay Return of In-Person Learning at Public Schools, Orders Continuation of Virtual Learning

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Pointing to the emergence of the Delta variant of Covid-19 in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the strain of the virus that research shows releases about [1,000 times more viral particles than the original variant](#), Governor Albert Bryan on Thursday ordered that the territory's public schools utilize virtual learning when they reopen on August 9.

The decision was made "out of an abundance of caution for the safety of students, teachers and Department of Education personnel," and as the Delta variant "continues its rampant spread throughout the world, the United States, and in the U.S. Virgin Islands and its Caribbean neighbors," Gov't House said.

Additionally, the V.I. Dept. of Health advised private and parochial schools to use virtual learning "during the current Covid-19 surge," though the guidance left many questions unanswered. A call placed to Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion to elaborate on the matter was not immediately returned.

"Our children are particularly vulnerable at this point while this wave of Covid is spreading rapidly among unvaccinated persons here in the territory and across the country," said the governor, who is currently in Florida [on a transportation industry-related trip](#) with local lawmakers. "The foundation of my decision-making regarding the Covid pandemic has been, and remains, the safety of our residents, and while in-person learning is desired, the priority is our public health and safety first and foremost."

He added, "As we watch businesses and the federal government institute requirements that their employees be vaccinated, it makes no sense to tempt fate by trying to maintain our goal of starting the 2021-2022 school year with in-person learning in our public schools until this second deadly wave of the virus is under control and no longer posing a threat to people of all ages."

As of Wednesday, the territory had 210 active Covid-19 cases: 146 on St. Thomas, sixty-two on St. Croix and two on St. John, [according to D.O.H.](#) Numbers for Thursday were not available at time of writing.

Gov't House said Mr. Bryan once again reiterated his continued call for all Virgin Islanders and visitors to the territory to get vaccinated immediately to help remove the threat of Covid-19 from causing more unnecessary deaths and extreme illness among those who have not yet gotten the vaccine.

A decision on when the territory's public schools will switch to in-person learning, as originally planned for the upcoming school year, will be made based on how the continued surge of Covid-19 progresses, according to the administration.

The Department of Education will issue complete details on laptop distribution, virtual orientations and other pertinent information for parents and students, Gov't House said.

Mr. Bryan's decision comes a day after D.O.H. [issued an advisory](#) urging that all children age 12 and older in the territory get vaccinated.

Ms. Encarnacion said, "With two children recently discharged from our hospitals with Covid-related illness, it is evident that this virus is severely affecting children the same way it is affecting adults. With the 210 active COVID-19 cases and a 4.58% positivity rate, I support the Department of Education's decision to begin school virtually. The health and safety of our students is a high priority."

"It becomes even more critical for children 12 to 17 years of age to be vaccinated as the COVID vaccine is the only proven factor in reducing transmission, severe illness and death," she added.

D.O.E. Commissioner, Racquel Berry-Benjamin, stated, "While we certainly were anticipating and ready to begin the 2021-2022 school year with in-person learning, putting even one life at risk unnecessarily is one too many. When we can convince enough Virgin Islanders to get vaccinated so we can reach herd immunity and the current threat from this deadly virus is under control, we plan to immediately employ the plans we already have in place to teach our students in person. The health and safety of our students and employees is our top priority."

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