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# Bryan Mulls Vaccine Mandate as Hospitalizations Jump to 29, Deaths to 39; Cross-Contamination Confirmed at JFL; 'We are At a Serious Turning Point'

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**Ventilator machines at a hospital. By. GETTY IMAGES**

Twenty-nine people were hospitalized territory-wide as of Monday for Covid 19 — twenty-three at the Juan F. Luis Hospital and six at the Schneider Regional Medical Center. Additionally, thirty-nine individuals have died from Covid-19, two of them over the weekend, and "nine of them in the last month."

Those were the words of Governor Albert Bryan, who expressed grave concern during Monday's Covid-19 press briefing at the rising number of cases and hospitalizations.

Mr. Bryan, after repeating the latest data for good measure, went on to admonish Virgin Islands about following Covid-19 protocols and above all else, taking the Covid-19 vaccines.

The governor said while he has seen the memes about remarks he recently made while assailing vaccine doubters and conspiracy theorists, the Delta variant of Covid-19 — now prevalent in the territory — is no joking matter.

"The sobering reality is that this is as serious a situation, dire even as our healthcare system has ever faced," Mr. Bryan said. "We are at a serious turning point, Virgin Islanders. And this debate about whether to take the vaccine is not worth your health, and it's not worth your safety."

He said while there may be emphasis on breakthrough Covid-19 cases with the Delta variant where vaccinated individuals become infected, "the science still makes it very, very clear: once you take that vaccine you reduce your risk of becoming infected with Covid-19 by 60-90 percent depending on what vaccine you have. And if by chance you are infected while fully vaccinated, you are less likely to become severely ill or need to even be in the hospital."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday that vaccinated people who become ill with the Delta variant of Covid-19 may be spreading the virus, a development the federal health authority said led to its recommendation that vaccinated people should wear masks indoors and in public in certain parts of the country where infection rates are high.

The CDC said an outbreak in Cape Cod, Massachusetts informed its recommendation, after it found that 127 vaccinated people infected with the Delta variant during the outbreak appeared to carry as much virus as eighty-four unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people who got infected.

Mr. Bryan reminded Virgin Islanders that while no new restrictions have been announced, the ones already in place — no deejays or picnics with groups on beaches, though the beach curfew has been lifted; no dancing at nightclubs, though those establishments can open and serve seated guests and must close at midnight; and expanded capacity at facilities such as churches, among others — remain in place.

He said the government had not been enforcing many of the rules, however things changed over the weekend where a number of establishments were ordered shut, with Mr. Bryan pointing to high infection rates among employees as part of the reason. Among the businesses closed was a large grocery store and an auto parts facility on St. Thomas, the Consortium has learned.

### **Vaccination Mandate**

The governor also said he has been considering mandating Covid-19 vaccination for government employees. "If we were to move in that direction I would issue an executive order saying that every single government employee or any hiree must be vaccinated before they enter into work, or present a Covid test weekly. That would be the way we would go so you would still have a choice — but you would have to get that Covid test weekly," the governor said. Mr. Bryan said the administration has limits on how far it could push such mandates.

There are currently roughly 9,000 government employees, according to the governor.

President Joseph Biden announced last week mandatory vaccination, or all-day mask-wearing and weekly testing for federal employees and on-site contractors. He has also directed the U.S. Dept. of Defense to determine how and when Covid-19 shots can be added to the list of vaccinations required for members of the U.S. military, according to the White House.

## **Cross-Contamination at JFL Hospital**

As of Monday, St. Thomas had six Covid patients at the Schneider Regional Medical Center and 156 active infections, while St. Croix had ninety-five active infections and twenty-three patients at the Juan F. Luis Hospital. Mr. Bryan explained the situation. "The twenty-three [patients] on St. Croix is an aberration because unfortunately there was cross-contamination at the hospital where patients went to the hospital Covid-free and ended up with Covid," said the governor.

A individual called the Consortium Sunday morning complaining that her father, who is in his nineties, visited the hospital Covid-free and was discharged with the virus. She said she later received a call informing her that the hospital did not expect the man to live more than a few days. Distraught, the elderly man's daughter called the Consortium seeking help. Governor Bryan said today he knew of the situation, though he said he was not aware that the man was given only a few days to live.

"I am aware of the situation. I made some calls on that last night to try to get some home care for the patient," the governor said. He said the hospital's justification for releasing the patient was that his condition did not necessitate hospitalization even though this person was ill with the virus.

"I tried to call around last night. I think we got the situation [under] control with some home care because it is a dire situation that we're dealing with."

Mr. Bryan said the administration was doing its best to control the state of affairs at the hospital. He told the Consortium Sunday that additional medical staff, through Pafford Medical Services, would provide support to JFL.

JFL issued a statement on Sunday stating that it was at an all-time high with Covid-19 patients, at the time eighteen. Today, the hospital issued another release regarding mitigation action it was taking. But the hospital did not provide information to the public relative to the cross-contamination matter, and attempts to reach hospital CEO Dyma Williams and its media contact Chivonne Thomas were unsuccessful.

According to the V.I. Dept. of Health, there were 255 active Covid-19 cases territory-wide: 156 on St. Thomas, 95 on St. Croix and four on St. John. Thirty-nine individuals have died, including two over the weekend, identified by D.O.H. as a 68-year-old man on St. Thomas and an 84-year-old female on St. Croix.