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## In the BVI, Covid-Related Deaths Climb to 37, But Hospitalizations and Active Cases Recede

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TORTOLA, BVI — Covid-19 deaths in the British Virgin Islands have climbed to 37 according to the most recent data, as the British territory experiences a devastating coronavirus outbreak that started at the end of June and wreaked havoc — taking the lives of 36 individuals in just over a month.

Even so, the BVI is seeing some positive signs. Even as deaths have climbed to 37 — just three behind the U.S. Virgin Islands whose population is over three times the size of the BVI's — the number of cases have declined to 441 from a peak of over 1,600, though still elevated for a population of 30,000.

Also on the decline were hospitalizations. At its peak, the BVI said over 30 individuals were hospitalized, but that number is now down to 8 as of Friday.

As of July 28, a total of 16,445 people in the BVI had received vaccination, while 11,438 were fully vaccinated. The BVI government has set a goal of 22,500 vaccinations, which the territory says would help it reach herd immunity.

Many had thought the outbreak in the BVI was due to the Delta variant, but on July 23 BVI Acting Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ronald Georges 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.

Back in the USVI, Governor Albert Bryan expressed doubt that Delta had not impacted the British territory, saying if indeed it had not, when it does arrive, the British territory would have to brace for its devastating impacts.