

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## USVI Covid-19 Vaccination Rates Among Lowest in the Country, Puerto Rico Among the Highest

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USVI and PR flags. By. GETTY IMAGES

Two American territories less than an hour apart by air travel have vastly different vaccination adoption rates, with the USVI being [among the lowest](#) in the nation while Puerto Rico ranks amongst the highest.

The low vaccination rates in the U.S. Virgin Islands and [mounting deaths](#) related to the virus have accelerated the plea from local leaders encouraging residents to get vaccinated against Covid-19. "The vaccines are working by reducing infections and preventing severe illness and hospitalizations," said USVI Territorial Epidemiologist Dr.

Esther Ellis on Monday. "Our hospitals continue to admit unvaccinated individuals with serious illness despite us having the tools to avoid this. We are seeing decreased hospitalizations but increased deaths and many of our hospitalizations are ventilated. This shows how dire the situation is."

Dr. Ellis said that as of Monday 45.7 percent of the eligible population in the USVI was fully vaccinated against Covid-19. In Puerto Rico, the percentage of fully vaccinated among the eligible population as of Thursday was 68.5 percent. The island commonwealth's first-dose vaccination rate stood at 80 percent, while the USVI's first-dose percentage stood at roughly 57 percent.

The reason for the disparity has not been researched, however, the USVI has done a good job of balancing restrictions with economic activity over the course of the pandemic. On Monday, the USVI's positivity rate stood at 4.5 percent, while Puerto Rico's as of Wednesday was 12 percent. The USVI has experienced 51 Covid-related deaths to date out of a population of 110,000, while Puerto Rico as of Thursday had more than 2,600 deaths out of its 3.3 million population.

Both territories in recent times have seen a surge in active cases because of the Delta variant of Covid-19, though Puerto Rico's surge, based on the positivity rate, is more severe.

On Monday, Puerto Rico's government started requiring employees and customers of restaurants and other enclosed food and drink and entertainment facilities to get vaccinated or show proof of a negative Covid-19 test— a more stringent approach than the USVI. Noncompliance will result in a fine of \$5,000 or six months in jail, the government said.

While the U.S. Virgin Islands has limits on capacity and has reinstated a beach curfew of 4:00 p.m., there has been no mandatory vaccine or proof of negative test requirement to dine in restaurants or to participate in entertainment activities. In cases where proof of vaccination or negative Covid-19 test is required in the USVI for such activities, these protocols are put in place by organizers of the events, not the government.

Beginning Sept. 9, all USVI government employees will have to test weekly for Covid-19 if they are not vaccinated, Governor Bryan said earlier this month — a move already implemented by the PR government. Mr. Bryan said at time the announcement was part of a strategy to make life more difficult for Virgin Islanders who are not inoculated, though the action only affects government employees.

"Our strategy is not to purposely make things more inconvenient for the unvaccinated, but the vaccinated people did what they were supposed to do - we're not going to make them suffer," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "Everybody suffers as a result of people who don't want to get vaccinated for whatever reason it may be." We're going to make the laws that benefit the people who have taken the vaccines."

To unvaccinated government employees, Mr. Bryan stated, "So if you want to get a cotton swab up your nose every single week, then so be it. That's what we mean by a little bit more difficult."

He said the weekly tests could be prevented if 15,000 people get vaccinated before September 9, a mark that is extremely difficult to reach at this point.

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