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USVI Ready to Verify People Vaccinated Outside Territory, But Concerning Covid Data Keeps Bryan From Giving the Greenlight

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American Airlines and Spirt Airlines side-by-side on St. Croix late October, 2021. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

Puerto Rico's travel portal is verifying individuals vaccinated on the U.S. mainland, while the USVI has been hesitant to send the feature live, with Governor Albert Bryan expressing concern that it would lead to more Covid-19 transmission.

Puerto Rico, just 40 miles away from the USVI also has the highest Covid-19 vaccination rate in all of the U.S., according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Puerto Rico Department of Health.

Employees working at the San Juan International Airport were able to quickly verify a Consortium reporter's vaccination status during a recent trip, though this reporter was vaccinated in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Mr. Bryan last week told the Consortium that the USVI already has the capability to verify those vaccinated outside the territory, however he has been debating whether to greenlight the feature, wary that the virus's spread could increase because of it.

According to the [CDC](#), Puerto Rico as of Saturday had a rate of 83.4 percent of people who are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, the highest rate in the U.S. Puerto Rico's health department [shows](#) an 82 percent rate of those fully vaccinated and 90.4 percent with at least one dose of a Covid vaccine. It is possible that the difference in data is related to the PR health department providing fresh data to the CDC in realtime; the island's own data is expected to refresh on Monday, possibly leading to an alignment.

Relative to the states, Vermont had the highest vaccination rate as of Saturday, with 81.9 percent of the entire state's population fully vaccinated, while 92.4 percent of the population has received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, according to [the state's health department](#). CDC data [matches](#) that of Vermont's health department.

While Puerto Rico's current Covid-19 transmission is benefiting from widespread vaccination with an average positivity rate of 3-4.9 percent, Vermont is currently experiencing a surge of infections even with its status as the state with the highest vaccination rate in the country.

Vermont Governor Phil Scott said recently that the rise in cases was being caused by unvaccinated individuals. "The high number of cases continues to be dominated by those who are unvaccinated," Mr. Scott said earlier this month.

The surge, a result of the Delta variant's highly contagious and transmissible nature, has been putting pressure on hospitals in the state already under strain from other healthcare demands, among them catching up on care that had been delayed due to the pandemic.

Additionally, it is now a foregone conclusion, based on extensive data, that the vaccines do not prevent transmission, meaning vaccinated individuals spread the virus, too. What the vaccines are very effective at is saving lives and preventing hospitalization, though vaccine efficacy on those fronts have been diminished by the Delta variant.

Vaccine efficacy also diminishes overtime, with one study of over 800,000 veterans who were vaccinated in March 2021 showing a dramatic decline in the vaccines' strength six months later. According to the study, [reported by the L.A. Times](#), by the end of September, Pfizer's two-dose Covid-19 vaccine fell from an 89 percent effectiveness to 45 percent, while Moderna's two-dose vaccine, which measured as 89 percent effective in March, fell to 58 percent effective.

These outcomes have heightened Governor Bryan's concern relative to allowing individuals vaccinated outside the territory to travel to the USVI without the need for a negative Covid test once verified through the territory's travel portal.

"We want to [start verifying those vaccinated outside the USVI] but I really feel funny about letting people who are vaccinated or not without a test coming into the Virgin Islands," Mr. Bryan told the Consortium Wednesday. "The Departments of Health and Tourism, they are ready and I'm the one that's [hesitant]."

Mr. Bryan said the territory will eventually have to follow suit. "We're going to have to move to that just to be competitive," he said. "[But] I don't want to change too many things at once so if something goes wrong I know what it is."

