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USVI Turns Away Two Cruise Ships as Covid-19 Positivity Rate Surpass Agreed Upon Threshold

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An aerial shot of the Crown Bay dock in St. Thomas, officially named the Babe" Monsanto Marine Terminal. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Cruise ships with more than 1% positivity Covid-19 rate onboard on the day they are scheduled to berth at harbors in the U.S. Virgin Islands will not be permitted because of a memorandum of understanding between the cruise ships and the Bryan administration.

Enforced through the V.I. Department of Health, the MOU is very specific relative to when a ship will be turned away. "We have a memorandum of understanding with our cruise lines and if they get beyond 1% positivity, we will shut it all down," Governor Albert Bryan said during Monday's news briefing. He spoke of one of two recently turned away ships and said the infection rate was

among the crew, not the passengers.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion disclosed that two cruise ships were actually turned away last weekend from the territory. "We turned away two cruise ships this weekend, unfortunately, one was 1.2% and the other was 1.9%. The one with 1.9% we looking at 4,500 passengers and about 900 crew and we had about 28 positives out of that," she said while explaining that cruise ship with 1.2% positive cases had more passengers.

Last week the cruise ship Symphony of Seas which had berthed in St. Thomas had eight or nine cases, and when it returned to Florida and passengers were retested it was then [discovered that there were 48 infections in total](#). Ms. Encarnacion said it would be difficult to pin the rise in cases on the cruise ship. And Governor Bryan expressed strong support for the industry. "I'll say it publicly, the cruise ships have been shutdown for a year and a half; they've taken a tremendous hit to their business. They're one of our crucial tourism partners, and I just want to make sure that we give them a fair shake," Mr. Bryan said. "They're under considerable pressure as it is with this new Omicron variant and I'm praying for them and hoping that they can get their situation under control so they don't have to stop sailing again."

In October 2021, the CDC extended the Framework for Conditional Sailing Order (CSO) with minor modifications. CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky signed the Temporary Extension & Modification and it would remain in effect until January 15, 2022.

The BVI has also been turning away ships as Covid-19 cases increase, with observers suspecting the Omicron variant.

After the expiration of the Temporary Extension & Modification of the CSO, CDC intends to transition to a voluntary program, in coordination with cruise ship operators and other stakeholders, to assist the cruise ship industry to detect, mitigate, and control the spread of Covid-19 onboard cruise ships.

Royal Caribbean website says that cruises departing from all U.S. homeports including San Juan, Puerto Rico will only host fully vaccinated passengers.

"Guests age 12 and older must present proof of Covid-19 vaccination, with the final dose of their vaccine administered at least 14 days before sailing. Children age 5 to 11 who have been vaccinated may present proof of full vaccination and follow the protocols for vaccinated guests," the cruise line advised.

"Each guest's regimen must include at least two doses of vaccine unless the guest received the single dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. This guidance is per the U.S. CDC, and no exceptions will be made, even if the guest's resident country has authorized a single-shot regimen for a two-dose vaccine," said the cruise lines on its website.

Guests under age 12 who are not vaccinated will complete additional Covid-19 testing requirements depending on the length and departure port of their sailing.

Between December 28th and 31st approximately 39,000 passengers are expected to arrive in the territory from 13 ships, including yachts, with passengers per ship ranging from 110 to 4,506 passengers.

Cruise ships visiting the U.S. Virgin Islands stop in St. Thomas and St Croix. St. Thomas is the most popular port of call for cruise lines because it has two docks: the West Indian Co. dock and Crown Bay dock.

