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Bryan Extends Restrictions Through Jan. 25 as Hospitalizations Climb to 18 Territory-Wide; Gov't Office Closures Also Extended

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Covid testing area at an airport. Governor Bryan extended for two weeks restrictions he put in place just before the new year. Among the restrictions is an unpopular 72-hour testing requirement for people coming into the USVI. By. GETTY IMAGES

Governor Albert Bryan announced Monday an extension through January 25 of restrictions he put in place two weeks ago, which saw bars and restaurants stopping the sale of alcohol at 11:00 p.m. and closing at midnight. He also announced that gov't office closures for in-person services would be extended through Jan. 25 as well.

Also remaining in place is the requirement to secure a Covid-19 test within 72-hours of a flight to the USVI, a restriction that is enforced across the board for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, along with residents and visitors. This restriction is set to expire by the end of January, barring any changes.

As Covid-19 cases continue to rise to near 4,000 as of Saturday, more and more operations both public and private are being impacted. Meanwhile, hospitalizations have climbed to eighteen territory-wide, with twelve on St. Thomas where three patients were ventilated as of Monday, and six on St. Croix with no patients ventilated.

"I know some of you are inconvenienced by the scale back of our office hours, but we just want to ensure the safety of our employees by reducing interactions with the public," Mr. Bryan said Monday. "Just like everybody else in the territory, we're facing staffing challenges as well as more and more of our personnel are infected with Covid-19. And rather than shut down totally, we're staggering hours and being able to keep people in."

A list of gov't offices whose in-person schedules have been impacted because of the spread of the Omicron variant can be found [here](#).

The governor spoke of the burdensome requirement of securing a Covid-19 test within 72 hours of traveling to the USVI, a situation that has been exacerbated by the lack of available test kits or facilities because of the rapid surge in active cases. "I know it was very strenuous for a lot of people, and our apologies, but we're just trying to keep the majority of people safe. So it's still [getting a Covid-19 test within 72 hours] to get into the territory, whether you're vaccinated or not," he said.

There were no changes made to beach protocols, meaning beaches will remain open. "We're hoping this surge subsides quickly, but if what we're seeing globally and nationally is any indication, I think we still have at least a week or so of riding this out and then hopefully it will expire sometime around the next two weeks in terms of starting to go down," Mr. Bryan said.

The territory's positivity rate was 24.30 percent as of Monday, according to Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. She said vaccination rates and persons taking booster Covid-19 shots have increased as the Omicron-driven wave of cases continues.

The V.I. Dept. of Health reported 3,782 active cases on Saturday, the department's latest update ahead of new data expected to be published later today.

The cases are up 474 cases from Thursday, with St. Thomas accounting for 1,821 of the active infections, followed by St. Croix with 1,708, and St. John with 253 — all record-breaking numbers.