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With Cruise Ship Guidelines From CDC Becoming Voluntary Saturday, Bryan Says Stringent Local Rules Will Remain in Place

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Ernice Gilbert **January 14, 2022**

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Cruise ships at the Austin Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay, St. Thomas

Cruise ships will no longer need to follow Covid-19 guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention beginning tomorrow, the day the federal health authority's Conditional Sailing Order expires. The CDC has decided not to extend the order, instead allowing cruise ships to formulate their own protocols or voluntarily adhere to the CDC's Covid-19 risk mitigation program, according to CDC spokesman David Daigle.

The program includes guidelines aimed at helping the cruise lines continue operations in a manner that is safe and protects the health of its passengers. "Cruise ships operating in U.S. waters

choosing to participate in the program on a voluntary basis agree to follow all recommendations and guidance issued by the CDC as part of this program," the CDC said.

On Friday, Governor Albert Bryan clarified that while the CDC's guidelines would shift to a voluntary program, the local protocols would remain in place. "In many ways, our protocols and guidelines are even more stringent than some of the CDC's guidelines. While we don't want to turn away any of our cruise partners, the Administration's primary goal is to keep our residents and visitors safe during this pandemic," Mr. Bryan said. "We met with each cruise line that visits the USVI and they have signed contracts agreeing to comply with our protocols and regulations. The CDC making its cruise ship guidelines optional won't affect any of our agreements with the cruise lines."

According to Gov't House, under the current agreements the GVI has with its cruise line partners:

- Ships can not exceed a 1 percent positivity rate, and if a ship exceeds that, neither passengers nor crew will be allowed to disembark.
- Any passenger or crew that tests positive cannot disembark.
- Ships must have COVID-safe procedures in place in case of emergencies that require a transfer to the hospital.

The CDC uses a color-coding system to monitor Covid cases aboard cruise ships and all ships on the current list are either green, yellow or orange, which means the volume of Covid cases they have reported meets the CDC's threshold for investigation, Gov't House said.

According to the CDC, ships operating in U.S. waters and sailing international itineraries that choose not to participate in its voluntary program will be classified as "gray" on the health authority's "Cruise Ship Color Status" website, which will indicate that protocols put in place by the ship's operator haven't been reviewed by the CDC.