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VITEMA Announces Vaccination Hotline; Health Operating Pop-Up Sites for Free COVID-19 Testing

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — During the Government House weekly press briefing on Monday, February 1, 2021, VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen announced a new hotline for individuals who are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination to schedule an appointment with a healthcare provider to get the shot.

“Currently, the Territory is still serving Phase 1A and Phase 1B, and as a result the 28-plus providers were quickly overwhelmed by individuals desiring the COVID-19 vaccine,” Director Jaschen said. “Phase 1B represents a significant increase in the eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine from the initial Phase 1A, which represents healthcare workers, EMS workers, dialysis patients, long-term care facility staff and some residents.”

Phase 1B now includes residents age 65 or older, college-age students, restaurant workers, grocery store workers, hotel and casino workers, plus 28 local government and federal agencies.

Beginning Tuesday, February 2, 2021, healthcare providers who would like to partner with VITEMA to administer and any eligible individual who would like a COVID-19 vaccine can call the VITEMA vaccination hotline at 340-777-8227 (VACS).

The vaccination hotline will operate from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday to Friday, and is staffed with both English and Spanish speaking personnel. Both insured and uninsured are welcome to call the hotline and those 65 and older are encouraged to call.

Veterans age 55 or older also are eligible and can call the VITEMA hotline or make an appointment through the Veterans Administration at 787-641-4591.

Appointments also can be scheduled on the VITEMA website at www.vitema.vi.gov.

Insured and non-insured individuals can receive the vaccination, and no provider is permitted to request out-of-pocket cost or ask for an individual reimbursement.

Pop-Up testing sites

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion announced more frequent and regular pop-up sites on all three islands for free COVID-19 tests. No appointment is necessary at the drive-up sites, and results are typically sent within 24 hours.

This week, pop-up testing sites will be at the following locations:

- **St. Thomas Home Depot** on Tuesday, February 2 from 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Canegata Rec Center** on St. Croix on Tuesdays – February 2, 9, 16 and 23 – from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- **The V.I. Port Authority Gravel Yard** on St. John on Wednesday, February 3, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.
- **The Bordeaux Fire Station** on St. Thomas on Thursday, February 4, from 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Canegata Rec Center** on St. Croix on Thursdays – February 4, 11, 18 and 25 – from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Commissioner Encarnacion said 9,429 vaccines have been administered, 1,815 persons have completed their second doses and the positivity rate in the Territory currently is 4.1 percent.

“We did see some improvements, but with new cases seen throughout the Territory, our positivity rate fluctuates,” the Commissioner said. “We experienced an increase in hospitalizations last week with as many as six in the Territory at once.”

Commissioner Encarnacion also encouraged residents who have received the vaccine to use VSafe, a smartphone-based tool that uses text messaging and web surveys to provide personalized health check-ins that can be downloaded at vsafe.cdc.gov.

For more information, go to covid19usvi.com/vaccines.

Stimulus checks

The Bureau of Internal Revenue expects to begin the rollout of the Second Economic Impact Payments, commonly known as stimulus checks, next week.

Each eligible taxpayer will receive \$600, and dependents who are 16 or younger also will receive a \$600 payment.

These second stimulus checks will be based on the 2019 tax returns, and tax year 2018 information cannot be used to qualify for a second stimulus payment.

Residents who already have filed their 2019 tax return need do nothing further to receive their payment. Residents who have not yet filed their 2019 return should do so as quickly as possible.

Social Security recipients who do not have a filing requirement do not need to file a return. Residents who did not work in 2019 and do not normally have to file a return, should file a Form 1040 return and put \$1 on the interest line. Those residents are required to file the return no later than February 15, 2021.

Limetree Bay

As Governor Albert Bryan Jr. forecast in his State of the Territory Address, Limetree Bay announced on Monday, February 1, that it has officially commenced refinery operations on St. Croix.

In a statement, Governor Bryan called the news a big victory for St. Croix and the USVI and noted that he looks forward to the refinery providing hundreds of well-paying quality jobs and the continuation of the successful public-private partnership between Limetree and the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Extended bar/restaurant hours for Super Bowl

Governor Bryan has ordered an extension to the hours for alcohol sales and the operating hours of bars and restaurants for Super Bowl Sunday, on February 7.

Effective only on Sunday, alcohol can be sold until midnight and bars and restaurants can remain open until 1 a.m.

Black History Month

Government House Communications Director noted that February 1 marks the start of Black History Month, and he encouraged residents to take some time to celebrate – and reflect upon – the toils, accomplishments and stories of our ancestors.

“The struggles of today are just as relevant to the fruits with which we hope to feed our future generations,” Director Motta said.

Unemployment

- As of January 31, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) has issued 52,908 unemployment insurance checks totaling \$43,516,680 to residents impacted by COVID-19 job losses.
- The department also has issued an additional 29,348 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation checks totaling \$50,072,340.
- VIDOL has issued 7,888 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance checks to self-employed Virgin Islanders totaling \$13,110,758 and \$6,211,536 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.
- Under the newly administered Lost Wages Assistance Program, VIDOL has issued 3,548 checks totaling \$2,994,148.

COVID-19 cases

- Currently tracking 91 active cases.
- 41,968 individuals tested to date (more than 40% of the population).
- 39,454 of those tests were negative.
- 2,421 tests came back positive.
- 2,306 people tested since March have recovered.
- 24 fatalities to date.

- One COVID-19 patient is hospitalized at Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix.
- One COVID-19 patient is hospitalized at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

The Bryan/Roach Administration continues to be committed to transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in government and ensuring that the disaster recovery is completed as quickly as possible.

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