GOVERNMENT HOUSE
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From left: Verita Carmichael of V.I. Lottery, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta Jr., Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis

Ulla Muller, Pearl B. Larsen Schools Resume In-Person Learning

Administration urges community's adherence to COVID-19 guidelines to protect children and the vulnerable

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – During the Government House weekly press briefing on Monday, September 13, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta Jr. said the Ulla Muller school on St. Thomas and the Pearl B. Larsen school on St. Croix have returned to in-person learning for students after being closed temporarily because of COVID-19 just a few days after in-person schooling resumed last week.

The Virgin Islands Department of Education resumed in-person learning for Pre-K through 3rd grade, C-TEC and special education students in the Territory's public schools on Tuesday, September 7, 2021. Students in 4th through 12th grades will continue to learn virtually.

"The Bryan-Roach Administration and its Department of Education understand fully the need to have our students back in the classroom setting and have worked with the Department of Health and the CDC to put in place protocols that would help minimize, to the extent possible, the risk of COVID-19 exposure to our students while on campus," Director Motta said. "Last week the department took that bold but necessary step forward for our students. But as we know, there is no way to ensure you have zero risk of exposure to COVID-19, and so, unfortunately, the Department of Education had to revert to virtual learning, per its health and safety protocols at two of its 15 learning centers currently engaged in in-person learning."

Director Motta asked that we all, as a community, take the protocols seriously and take the necessary precautions, if not for ourselves, for our children and others who are vulnerable.

He also urged parents and guardians to try to do their best to practice the things that are known to limit exposure to the virus:

- Wear your mask when out and in the workplace and ensure your children correctly wear theirs.
- Take guidance seriously to practice social distancing and avoid mass gatherings.
- Get the vaccine if you are able and eligible.

"The only way we can get the pandemic under control is together," Director Motta said, and he offered condolences on behalf of Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Lt. Governor Tregenza A. Roach to the families and friends of those who have died from the virus.

Vaccination Lottery winners

The winners for the September 3 drawings for $100,000 in the Vax-to-Win Lottery are:

- Tashana Benjamin on St. Croix
- Ingrid Iwuc in the St. Thomas-St. John District

Anyone 12 and older is eligible to receive the vaccine. Please make sure to have a parent or guardian accompany any minor wishing to get vaccinated and must bring an ID for both the minor and the parent or guardian.

Anyone who thinks they may have contracted COVID-19 can call the Epidemiology hotline at 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519. For more information, visit covid19usvi.com.

For information about the COVID-19 vaccines or to schedule an appointment to get vaccinated, call the VITEMA hotline Mondays-Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 340-777-VACS (8227). Vaccination appointments also can be scheduled online at covid19usvi.com/vaccines.

Residents can pre-register for testing online at www.covid19usvi.com/testing and free vaccines are available at the pop-up testing sites.

Child Tax Credit

Virgin Islands families who qualify for the Child Tax Credit have begun receiving those payments this past week through the hard work of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and Department of Finance.

"This has been a tremendous undertaking, as it is the first time that the Child Tax Credit is being issued in advance payments to Virgin Islanders who qualify as opposed to it reflecting on their income tax return," Director Motta said. "For some families, these checks represent a critical economic support, and the Bryan-Roach Administration is pleased to champion this initiative on behalf of the children of the territory."

The administration has received a number of inquiries regarding how to distinguish between the Child Tax Credits and the income tax refund checks. The Child Tax Credits from the BIR are coded on the check stub with the language "20191ADVCTC2021," which is how you can tell the difference between income tax refund payments and Child Tax Credit payments.

Qualified families can expect to receive 5 monthly payments of $300 through December 2021, and the balance of the child tax credit on their 2021 income taxes. The second round of monthly payments will be issued by the BIR and the Department of Finance this week.

ERAP Program
The Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority has begun issuing benefit payments to the 517 families and individuals eligible to receive benefits under the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. Governor Bryan is encouraging eligible Virgin Islanders to take advantage of this program while there is still time. The funds provided by the program can be used not only for rent but for utility bills as well.

For more information on the VI Emergency Rental Assistance Program or to see if you qualify and to get an application, visit erap.vihfa.gov or contact the VI Housing Finance Authority at 340-777-4655.

Holland Redfield and Elliot "Mac" Davis
Director Motta also expressed condolences on behalf of Governor Bryan and Lieutenant Governor Roach on the passing of two pillars of the Virgin Islands community: former Senator and longtime radio host Holland Refield and former Virgin Islands Solicitor General and community advocate Elliot "Mac" Davis

"Unfortunately, both men peacefully passed away this weekend. On behalf of Governor Bryan and Lieutenant Governor Roach, our condolences go out to their families and all in our community who are today mourning their loss," the Director said. "Their respective contributions to our Virgin Islands community are immeasurable, and they both will be sorely missed.

Water Island Virtual Town Hall
Governor Bryan, Lieutenant Governor Roach, alongside members of the Governor's Cabinet, are hosting a virtual town hall meeting this Wednesday, September 15, for residents of Water Island. Officials from DPNR, DLCA, Department of Tourism, Public Works, VIPD, Sports, Parks and Recreation and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority are joining this Wednesday's town hall and will answer any questions that residents may have.

COVID-19 vaccinations
As of September 7, more than 176 million people in the United States had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. During the same time, 2,675 vaccinated individuals with COVID have died, with 87% of those deaths among those over 65 years old and 27% of those deaths were persons who tested positive for COVID-19 at the time of death but the death was not COVID- related.

"Simply stated, if the virus is circulating and there are people who do not have immunity, the virus will continue to infect, spread and potentially change to stronger variants. The delta variant is now the predominant strain in the USVI," Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis said. "The majority of the population being vaccinated, or at least 70%, is necessary to effectively stop the spread of COVID amongst each other ending the likelihood of severe disease and death. Right now, we are at 52.4% of those over 18 years old in our population who are fully vaccinated."

COVID-19 cases as of September 13
- 3.5% seven-day positivity rate
- Currently tracking 229 active cases (145 STX; 78 STT; 6 STJ).
- 174,045 individuals tested to date.
- 167,756 people tested negative.
- 6,289 individuals tested positive.
- 5,994 individuals have recovered.

- 66 fatalities.
- There is 1 COVID-19 patient hospitalized, but not on a ventilator, at Juan F. Luis Medical Center on St. Croix.
- There are 3 COVID-19 patients hospitalized, with 1 on a ventilator, at Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas.

The Bryan-Roach Administration is committed to transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov

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