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Governor Bryan Orders Schools to Open With Virtual Learning Out of Abundance of Caution while COVID Surge Continues

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has ordered that the Territory's public schools utilize virtual learning when they reopen on August 9 out of an abundance of caution for the safety of students, teachers and Department of Education personnel while the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus continues its rampant spread throughout the world, the United States, and in the U.S. Virgin Islands and its Caribbean neighbors.

The Virgin Islands Department of Health also is advising private and parochial schools to use virtual learning during the current COVID-19 surge.

"Our children are particularly vulnerable at this point while this wave of COVID is spreading rapidly among unvaccinated persons here in the Territory and across the country," Governor Bryan said. "The foundation of my decision-making regarding the COVID pandemic has been, and remains, the safety of our residents, and while in-person learning is desired, the priority is our public health and safety first and foremost.

"As we watch businesses and the federal government institute requirements that their employees be vaccinated, it makes no sense to tempt fate by trying to maintain our goal of starting the 2021-2022 school year with in-person learning in our public schools until this second deadly wave of the virus is under control and no longer posing a threat to people of all ages," Governor Bryan said.

The Governor once again reiterated his continued call for all Virgin Islanders, and visitors to the Territory, to get vaccinated immediately to help remove the threat of COVID-19 from causing more unnecessary deaths and extreme illness among those who have not yet gotten the vaccine.

A decision on when the Territory's public schools will switch to in-person learning, as originally planned for the upcoming school year, will be made based on how the continued surge of COVID-19 progresses. The Department of Education will issue complete details on laptop distribution, virtual orientations and other pertinent information for parents and students.

The Governor's decision comes a day after the Virgin Islands Department of Health issued an advisory urging that all children age 12 and older in the Territory get vaccinated.

“With two children recently discharged from our hospitals with COVID-related illness, it is evident that this virus is severely affecting children the same way it is affecting adults. With the 210 active COVID-19 cases and a 4.58% positivity rate, I support the Department of Education’s decision to begin school virtually. The health and safety of our students is a high priority,” Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said.

“It becomes even more critical for children 12 to 17 years of age to be vaccinated as the COVID vaccine is the only proven factor in reducing transmission, severe illness and death,” Encarnacion added.

“While we certainly were anticipating and ready to begin the 2021-2022 school year with in-person learning, putting even one life at risk unnecessarily is one too many,” said Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin. “When we can convince enough Virgin Islanders to get vaccinated so we can reach herd immunity and the current threat from this deadly virus is under control, we plan to immediately employ the plans we already have in place to teach our students in person. The health and safety of our students and employees is our top priority.”

For more information, contact the V.I. Department of Education at public.relations@vide.vi or call 340-774-0100.

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