GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

COVID-19: SMALL VESSEL ENTRY PROTOCOL

Headline	**A protocol to enable the safe entry of small vessels into the Virgin Islands within the context of the Territory's COVID-19 pandemic response.**

I. General.

The purpose of this Protocol is to provide practical guidance for the safe entry of small vessels into the Virgin Islands territorial sea; noting that all persons on board the vessel must be fully vaccinated. This Protocol it is not intended to enable foreign-based vessels to conduct commercial activity in the Territory.

These guidelines were created in conjunction with the Government's published COVID-19 legislation, protocols, and procedures designed to help limit the spread of COVID-19, thereby sustaining lives and livelihoods; and:

(1) Has been developed using best practice guidelines outlined by globally recognised organisations in the sector;

(2) Is subordinate to the Territory's Border Entry Protocols;

(3) Should be applied in conjunction with the marine sector's COVID-19 Safe Operating Procedures published by the BVI Tourist Board, noting that any conflict must be referred to the Ministry of Health for clarification; and

(4) Streamlines the Territory's approach to, and oversight of, small vessels entering the Territory, recognising that entry procedures and measures to regulate business conducted by foreign entities are in place[1]. Of note it:

(a) Defines a '*Small Vessel'* as a vessel under 78 feet length overall;

(b) Enables both private and commercially registered small vessels to enter the Territory;

(c) Precludes:

i. Foreign-based small vessels from entering the Territory with [paying] passengers on board, or conducting commercial activity while in the Territory; and

ii. Small vessels day-tripping to the BVI given the heightened risk of COVID-19 exposure, unless the vessel is a pre-authorised water taxi operating in accordance with published protocols.

Small vessels can enter the BVI safely once their owners/operators work with the relevant BVI authorities openly, and agree in advance to strictly adhere to set standards and expectations.

[1] As determined in relevant legislation such as, but not limited to, the Commercial Recreation Vessels Licensing Act, 1992, Cruising Permit Ordinance, Cap. 203, Immigration and Passport Act, 2013, Labour Code, 2010, Merchant Shipping Act, 2001, and Ports Authority Act, 1990 (as amended).

Approved by Cabinet June 29, 2021
Gazetted – SI No 61 of 2021

II. Framework

(a) Requirements

Small Vessels (and owners/crew/guests) are required to:

(1) Use an approved Port of Entry (POE) within 24hrs of receiving travel approval from the BVI Gateway Travel Application Portal;

(2) Submit all relevant documents to the Ministry of Health and Social Development within the required timeframes:

a. Maritime Declaration of Health
b. Ship Sanitation Control Certificate
c. Crew List
d. Passenger List

(b) Comply with the BVI's COVID-19 protocols for fully vaccinated persons, noting that this includes:

(1) Proof of appropriate COVID-19 travel insurance;

(2) COVID-19 rt-PCR testing or approved rapid antigen testing for all travellers over age 5:

(a) 3-5 days before arrival;

(b) On Day 4 for children ages 5-17 (excluding day-trippers) accompanying fully-vaccinated travellers, conducted at a government-approved testing site or testing service;

(c) On Day 7 for children that accompanied day-trippers on both legs of the journey, conducted at a government-approved testing site or testing service; and

(d) Enforcement of sanctions for any breaches of extant COVID-19 protocols.

Foreign-based Small Vessels entering the Territory for the purpose of accessing safe anchorage, storage, maintenance, or repair services are required to present proof of such an agreement with a BVI-based entity.

III. Exemptions: Existing Ship Rider Agreements

Members of the Joint Task Force and foreign Participating Law Enforcement Agencies who engage in Ship Rider Agreements are exempted from these protocols in the course of their duties, provided that they are fully vaccinated at the time of participation in any Law Enforcement operations including Ship Rider Exercise Agreements within or outside the Territory.

VI. Oversight

Given anticipated sensitivities (in particular the risk of a resurgence of COVID-19 in the BVI) the Ministry of Health and Social Development (i.e. Public Health and Environmental Health Division) will work closely with key stakeholders to monitor and periodically review this Protocol to ensure its provisions are implemented effectively. Implementing partners include the Premier's Office; BVI Health Services Authority; Immigration Department; Her Majesty's Customs; Virgin Islands Shipping Registry; BVI Ports Authority; BVI Tourist Board; and the Marine Association of the BVI.