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Governor Bryan Receives Response from CDC About Cruise Ship Guidelines

USVI Has Established Binding Agreements with Cruise Lines to Safeguard Health and Well-being of Virgin Islanders and Visitors

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Maritime Unit has responded to Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s request for technical instructions for the next phases of the Framework for Conditional Sailing Order (CSO) guiding the resumption of cruise ship excursions at U.S. ports.

Governor Bryan had requested the information prior to the Territory's first cruise ship call – by Celebrity Edge on July 6, 2021 – since the COVID-19 pandemic suspended the cruise ship industry's excursions last spring.

On Tuesday, August 17, the Celebrity Edge made a port call to Crown Bay on St. Thomas, and Celebrity Equinox made a port call at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility on St. Croix on Wednesday, August 18.

While some states, such as Florida, struggle with setting guidelines for cruise ships, the Bryan-Roach Administration has been working with cruise ship operators to resume sailing excursions throughout 2021, and has established binding protocols, in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) and the Virgin Islands Department of Health (DOH), that regulate the vessels visiting the Territory.

Requirements of Cruise Lines and Passengers:

- All guests 12 and older must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 for the ship to be allowed entry to the port.

- The ship should have a minimum of 85% vaccination among the entire population of guests and crew onboard, and any percentages below the 85% requires contact and consultation with the DOH.
- Excluding passengers who willingly provide proof of vaccination, all disembarking passengers (age 2 or older) must have provided to cruise lines a negative COVID-19 test result taken within five days prior to arrival into the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Any positive passenger, or identified close contact passenger, must remain in isolation on the cruise ship.
- All passengers must agree to all established rules and requirements while inside the restricted area.
- Access to all vaccination cards will be provided to the DOH Division of Epidemiology in advance for validation.
- Emergency contractors required for critical ship maintenance can be exempted of the vaccination requirement, as long as the ship remains above the vaccination threshold; however, the DOH requires emergency contractors to have a negative COVID-19 test result taken within five days prior to arrival into the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- A cruise line operator's inadvertent errors with regard to a guest's vaccination status shall not prevent the vessel from making port provided that in all such cases the cruise operator must report all discrepancies to the DOH immediately after the error is detected or at least 12 hours prior to arrival; subject the passenger(s) whose vaccination status has caused such discrepancies to the same testing protocols required for unvaccinated guests; and receive approval from the DOH to be allowed entry to the port.

In its response to Governor Bryan, the CDC said it is not planning to release any further documents for Phase 4, the last phase, of the CSO, which says cruise ship operators with approved COVID-19 Conditional Sailing Certificate applications may sail with passengers following the CSO.

"Instead, CDC will update online documents to incorporate changes to quarantine, testing, color-coding status and lessons learned from simulated voyages," according to the CDC's response to Governor Bryan.

The CDC's letter to the Governor also notes that as of July 13, 2021, the CDC's Maritime Unit has received port agreements from cruise operators representing 11 brands, including Royal Caribbean International; Carnival Cruise Lines; Celebrity Cruises; Disney Cruise Line; Holland America Line; MSC Cruises; Norwegian Cruise Line; Oceania Cruises; Princess Cruises; Regent Seven Seas Cruises; and Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line.

Also as of July 13, the CDC's Maritime Unit has received requests to conduct simulated cruises for 13 ships and applications for a COVID-19 Conditional Sailing Certificate for 17 vessels, according to the CDC's letter.

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