



**GOVERNMENT OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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PRESS RELEASE

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DOH Announces Arrival of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine in the U.S.V.I.

St. Croix, US Virgin Islands— The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health has joined the rest of the nation in embarking on the historic event of the receipt and distribution of the first shipment of the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer. This is a major breakthrough and comes amid the current surge of the virus in the territory.

Today, 975 doses of the vaccine have arrived on St. Croix and will allow providers to start Phase 1A vaccinations in both the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John district. This phase includes clinical healthcare staff, and residents and staff in long-term care facilities throughout the territory per Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations. As more vaccines are ordered and delivered on a weekly basis, populations in Phases 1B through 1C will begin and will cover first responders, persons with immunocompromised conditions and the 65 and older population. It is expected for the department to roll into subsequent phases on a frequent basis.

The Food and Drug Administration signed the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) on Friday and the ACIP met on Saturday to establish recommendations for use of the Pfizer vaccine. Healthcare providers across the territory have since been provided with information on handling and administering the Pfizer vaccine and further details about the product. There are several calls scheduled this week through Clinicians Outreach and Communication Activity (COCA) as well as training sessions directly with Pfizer for the

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proper handling and administration of the vaccine. These schedules have been provided to all healthcare providers, even those not providing COVID-19 vaccinations.

The arrival of the vaccines comes days after the department, in partnership with federal and local partners, exercised the plan to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine across the territory using a hub and spoke approach. Pfizer vaccines will be delivered to storage hubs where an ultra-cold storage freezer is stationed and redistributed to select clinical healthcare entities-or spokes-where vaccines will be administered. The vaccine distribution drill was a success and has prepared the health department and partners for receiving the actual vaccine.

“We are pleased to be a part of the process and the positive responses from healthcare providers, clinical staff, and the community are encouraging. This is the glimmer of hope that our community has been waiting for—but it is not the end and we must remain vigilant,” said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

The department is prepared to coordinate the distribution of the vaccine and will continue to educate healthcare providers through training by federal and Pfizer vaccine officials. This will allow the department to finalize details of vaccination scheduling of targeted populations, confirm data reporting, and continue dissemination of public information.

Even with the arrival of the vaccine, the department urges the community to continue to adhere to guidelines and best practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The COVID-19 vaccine is set to be available to the general public in early Spring 2021.