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## PRESS RELEASE

*For Immediate Release*

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### **VI Department of Human Services Head Start Classrooms on St. Croix to Operate Virtually**

*Meal Distribution Paused Until Monday, October 4, 2021,  
St. Thomas to Continue In-Person Operations*

**U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS** – The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS), announced that it has curtailed in-person classroom activities on St. Croix, until Monday October 4, 2021, to allow staff and students to undergo COVID testing. These actions are in line with their efforts to keep Head Start staff and students safe as the community continues to navigate the ever-changing pandemic environment.

According to the Department of Human Services, even while following recommended safety precautions such as reduced number of students per classroom to increase physical distancing, mask wearing, frequent sanitizing and keeping groups of children and teachers in “bubbles” to reduce comingling and chances of on-the-job exposure, the interconnectedness of the community is its own challenge.

According to Department of Human Services Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, “Not only must we be mindful of and knowledgeable about confirmed positives involving our staff, students and contractors at our sites, but remember that a lot of our students have siblings in their homes that are also now back to school in-person. Having students in the Head Start classroom environment when siblings that they live with are at home because of possible COVID exposure at their schools, requires serious and careful consideration.”

While in-person classes had not yet resumed at all classrooms on St. Croix, VIDHS is aggressively working on a structured, effective, scalable protocol that will allow the program to keep students

and staff as safe as possible while the Territory works to come into compliance with federal program requirements for full in-person enrollment and services by January 2022.

“Some of our sites, such as the Frederiksted Head Start, were already addressing COVID exposure notifications when COVID testing revealed additional positives and we were notified of confirmed positives in the homes of multiple Head Start students,” Human Services Commissioner Kimberley Causey Gomez said. “There is nothing convenient about the challenges presented by the pandemic but we must focus on safety, while keeping in mind our commitment to ensuring that our little people are prepared to become successful learners. We cannot succumb to weariness at the length of time that we have been battling this nor wariness with reactions to tough decisions.”

The Department of Human Services also suspended meal distribution this week as nutrition and transportation staff must also test to ensure safe Head Start environments. The plans to resume in-person activities on October 4, 2020 will be modified as necessary as staff and students COVID test results are received.

Currently, staff and parents have been provided with information to access testing at the Department of Health or to private entities of their choice. All Head Start locations with confirmed positives are receiving additional cleaning prior to resumption of in person services.

All other DHS Head Start Centers and offices, including the Head Start Administrative Building on St. Croix, will continue their normal operations.

For information, contact the VIDHS Head Start Program at telephone number 340-773-1972 in the St. Croix district or 340-774-0930 ext. 4200 in the St. Thomas/St. John District, email [headstartvi@dhs.vi.gov](mailto:headstartvi@dhs.vi.gov) or visit <http://www.dhs.gov.vi/preschool/index.html>

To enroll your child in the Head Start program, utilize the online application portal:

1. Go to <https://vihs.mycopa.com/familyPortal/childCare.epl>
2. Select preferred language (English or Spanish) by clicking on English or Espanol in the top right corner
3. Click on “Register”
4. Give consent
5. Create a family and child profile

**Please be reminded to maintain CDC best practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19:**

- Wear your mask (covering your nose and mouth while in the workplace).
- Maintain social distance.
- Wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds, often.

- Wear appropriate other PPE while in contact with other staff or clients.
- Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol when you cannot wash hands.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces.
- Share FACTS, not rumors.

For general information, please visit the Department of Human Services website, [www.dhs.gov.vi](http://www.dhs.gov.vi) or on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/usvidhs>) at US Virgin Islands Department of Human Services.

If you are experiencing any of the coronavirus symptoms listed on the Department of Health website (listed below), self-quarantine and immediately contact the Department of Health:

- V.I. DOH website: <https://doh.vi.gov/>
- COVID-19 Hotline: (340) 712-6299 or (340) 776-1519

For more information on Covid19, the new strain of coronavirus, please visit the USVI Department of Health's website, [www.doh.vi.gov/coronavirus](http://www.doh.vi.gov/coronavirus) or text COVID19USVI to 888777. #COVID19USVI

The Department of Human Services (VIDHS) exists to provide social services to members in our community with diverse needs. In times of national uncertainty and hardship we act as a safety-net and exist to inspire hope and empower change through non-judgmental, quality delivery of needed services and resources. Please visit the Department of Human Services website, [www.dhs.gov.vi](http://www.dhs.gov.vi) for more information.

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory's people, infrastructure, and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government, and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit [transparency.vi.gov](http://transparency.vi.gov).

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