

Virgin Islands Housing Authority

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Office of the Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO : ALL VIHA EMPLOYEES

FROM : 
Robert Graham, CPM
Executive Director

DATE : September 30, 2021

RE : VIHA COVID-19 New Variant "DELTA" Operational Changes Continue

As you are aware, the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant cases within the territory continue to rise day by day. Remember, if you experience symptoms of respiratory illness (fever, coughing, or shortness of breath), please inform our Human Resources Department at (340) 715-7314, the Department of Health and/or your health care provider, and **please do not report to work**. The Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) will keep all medical information confidential and only disclose it on a need-to-know basis.

Wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing of six (6) feet is still mandatory in the Territory at businesses and in the workplace. It is now MANDATORY that ALL VIHA Employees must wear a mask while on VIHA premises; including inside all offices and outside on all site grounds and residential apartments; whether you are vaccinated or not. Face masks or other face coverings must cover the nose and mouth entirely, fit snug around both ears, and also fit snugly about the nose and chin. **According to VIHA's Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with the United Steelworkers (USW), failure to adhere to this directive or carry out a direct order is insubordination and may result in disciplinary action up to and including the possibility of termination.**

Additionally, VIHA will adhere to all directives from the Biden and Bryan Administrations regarding mandating vaccination for all employers with over 100 employees. Thus, VIHA will be moving towards establishing protocols for mandatory employee vaccination.

To this end, VIHA will be conducting another employee survey regarding COVID-19 and your vaccination status. I respectfully request your full participation with our Human Resources Department to gather information to facilitate strategies to get all employees fully vaccinated.



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Accordingly, VIHA continues to do everything possible to ensure that the health, safety, and well-being of our public housing residents, program participants, and staff are not compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Thus, the following administrative controls have been implemented.**

- The suspension of all in-person contact with the public at VIHA facilities throughout the Territory implemented on August 3, 2021, will continue **until further notice**. Other than routine service providers, members of the public are prohibited from entering VIHA’s facilities, including VIHA’s Central and Management Offices, at our various properties on each island.
- All public housing management offices will remain closed to the public **until further notice**. Site staff will continue to work in the office during regular business hours and may be reached by email, telephone and/or text message for questions and emergencies. A notice must be placed on the door or window of each office with all important alternative contact information.
- Article 18, *Safety and Health, Section 1, On the Job Provisions*, of the Collective Bargaining Agreement between VIHA and the United Steelworkers (USW), states in part that VIHA shall make reasonable provisions of wearing apparel as deemed necessary for the safety and protection of its employees.

Accordingly, based on the guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in partnership with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), relative to preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, **VIHA will continue to procure and disseminate masks, face shields, gloves, booties, coveralls, alcohol wipes, and hand sanitizers** to enable employees to perform their day-to-day duties and responsibilities safely.

- **Effective immediately and until further notice**, VIHA will resume performing **ALL** work order repairs. Maintenance employees are required to wear the appropriate safety personal protective equipment (PPE) needed for the work order to be completed. All staff must also wear face-covering, gloves, booties, and/or coveralls provided by VIHA to protect themselves from exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 or face disciplinary action.

VIHA’s decision to return to the processing of **All** work orders has been communicated to the leadership of the United Steelworkers, Local Unions 8248 and 8249. VIHA is confident that once employees adhere to the following safety protocols: wash hands frequently, maintain a 6-foot distance, wear face-coverings, inquire about symptoms before entering a unit, require families to wear masks while repairs are being performed, and use the appropriate PPEs for the repair work, this would reduce the potential for transmission of COVID-19. The USW is satisfied with the provisions above to protect employees' health and safety and supports VIHA's return-to-work orders.

If your department or assigned worksite has not provided you with the necessary personal protective equipments (PPEs), please call our HR Department and inform them of this situation, so we can immediately rectify it. If you have a medical condition that prevents you from wearing a mask, please contact our HR Department.



Failure to inform the HR Department of this condition and provide the necessary medical documentation will also result in disciplinary action.

Employees should never approach co-workers who are not wearing a mask to attempt to enforce any face-covering recommendation or requirement. Instead, the individual must maintain at least a 6-foot distance and raise the issue with their immediate supervisor or the HR Department.

- **Effective immediately and until further notice**, VIHA’s personnel are required to conduct a COVID-19 symptoms screening before entering units to perform repairs or inspections. Residents and/or program participants will be asked if anyone is showing symptoms of respiratory illness. If anyone in the apartment is ill, document the response on the form, do not enter the unit and advise your supervisor. If no one is ill, the staff is required to obtain a signature on the form and respectfully ask the head of household to instruct all individuals present to wear face-covering for personnel to enter the unit. Masks must remain on for the duration of the repairs or inspection, and a 6-foot distance must be maintained. The completed screening forms must be returned with the work order or inspection documents.

Below are specific steps for VIHA employees, public housing residents, program participants, and other stakeholders to reduce the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in the workplace. These steps shall be followed at VIHA premises, inside all offices, outside on all site grounds, and inside and outside residential apartments at all times.

- Continue to practice good hygiene, including washing your hands frequently with soap and water and using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily available.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces, like your headset, keyboard, doorknobs, etc., with disinfectant wipes or sprays.
- Avoid using other employees’ phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment.
- Avoid congregating in common and high-traffic areas.
- Avoid shaking hands and engaging in unnecessary physical contact as this would violate the required physical distancing of six feet.
- Participate in medical screenings (such as temperature and/or symptom checks) that may be required in the workplace by VIHA
- If requested, please cooperate with any investigation of potential COVID-19 case(s) in the workplace.
- Follow instructions on self-quarantine and self-monitoring for symptoms if identified as a person in close contact with an infected person in the workplace or otherwise directed to self-quarantine and self-monitor.



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Please continue to visit www.cdc.gov/nCoV or www.doh.vi.gov for additional information and resources on this serious health crisis.

Please stay safe, healthy and take care of yourself and your families.

C: Gerard Jackson, Staff Representative, USW

