



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Public Relations

1834 Kongens Gade, Charlotte Amalie * St. Thomas * U.S. Virgin Islands 00802-6746
Telephone: 340.774.0100 Ext. 8136 Fax: 340.774.1168
340.773.1095 Ext. 7064 Fax: 340.773.4624

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Contact: Cynthia T. Graham
Director, Public Relations & Communications
(340) 773-1095, Ext. 7064
cynthia.graham@vide.vi
www.vide.vi
www.facebook.com/usvi.vide

School Kitchens to Undergo Specialized Deep Cleaning During Holiday Break

ST. THOMAS, USVI – The Virgin Islands Department of Education will conduct specialized deep-cleaning during the holiday break of all school kitchens servicing the ‘No V.I. Child Goes Hungry’ Feeding Initiative in both school districts.

Meal distribution in the St. Thomas-St. John District will remain suspended on Dec. 23 and will resume when schools reopen following the break, Dec. 24-Jan. 6. Meals will not be distributed in either district during the annual Christmas break.

While kitchen surfaces, appliances and floors are cleaned daily by staff, the specialized cleaning will be performed by contracted COVID-certified professionals and focus on detailed sanitization of all areas in the school kitchens. All cleaning products currently in use by the Department’s custodial staff are items identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as effective in killing surface-borne viruses.

Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin said the deep-cleaning effort is in line with the Department’s commitment to ensure the health and safety of its frontline employees. Furthermore, she pointed out that with a Department transformational goal of ensuring knowledgeable and well-informed employees, it is important to educate workers on the facts of COVID-19.

“We deeply understand the concerns of our employees, but our goal is to also educate them about COVID-19 and its transmission—this is the number one way to eliminate fear around the virus so

that our employees can operate safely and securely as they continue to provide needed services to our families,” Berry-Benjamin said. “Our food service workers are essential to our operations by providing warm and nutritious meals to the many students that depend on them. We are grateful for our workers’ resilience and commitment.”

Since the emergence of the coronavirus in the Territory in March, the Department has held a number of in-person and virtual health and safety trainings, facilitated by the V.I. Department of Health, for its food service workers. Meetings were conducted on Aug. 12 and 13, and Sept. 10, 18 and 23, and most recently, on Dec. 14. Topics included an overview of the coronavirus, hand hygiene, proper use of PPEs, disinfection, and other related topics. Before the feeding program resumes in January, two additional days of reeducation training are being planned for workers.

“It is our duty to do everything we can to ensure these frontline employees feel empowered, while remaining safe during the coronavirus pandemic,” said Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III. “We lean heavily on the professionals at the V.I. Department of Health, who has been excellent partners throughout this process. We continue to be guided by the research and science around COVID-19.”

On December 21 and 22, Berry-Benjamin, Somme and other Department of Education officials met with union leaders and food service workers in the St. Thomas-St. John District to address concerns stemming from a Dec. 9 confirmed case of COVID-19 affecting one worker at the Charlotte Amalie High School kitchen.

The kitchen has been closed and deep-cleaned, and the affected employee remains in quarantine. All employees who may have come in contact with the affected employee have quarantined and undergone COVID-19 testing. To date, no additional food service employees have produced positive COVID-19 test results or presented any of the virus’s symptoms.

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