

## COVID-19: WATER TAXI PROTOCOL

<b>Headline</b>	<b>A protocol to enable the safe operation (domestic) of Water Taxis within the context of the Territory's COVID-19 pandemic response.</b>
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### I. General

a. The purpose of this Protocol is to provide practical guidance for the safe operation of BVI-based Water Taxis noting that only fully vaccinated passengers are allowed to be transported into the Territory by Water Taxi. Of note, it is designed to enable water taxis to:

- (1) Provide safe transfers for international travel between the BVI and USVI ensuring the safety of the operator, guest/passenger, destination and wider community; and
- (2) Operate as 'approved' transport within the BVI.

This Protocol it is not intended to enable foreign-based Water Taxis to conduct commercial activity in the Territory.

b. This Protocol is to be read in conjunction with the Government's published COVID-19 legislation, protocols, and procedures designed to help limit the spread of COVID-19, thereby sustaining lives and livelihoods; and:

- (1) Has been developed using best practice guidelines outlined by globally recognised organisations in the sector;
- (2) Is subordinate to the Territory's Border Entry Protocols;
- (3) Should be applied in conjunction with the marine sector's COVID-19 Safe Operating Procedures published by the BVI Tourist Board, noting that any conflict must be referred to the Ministry of Health for clarification;
- (4) Streamlines the Territory's approach to, and oversight of, vessels entering the Territory, recognising that entry procedures and measures to regulate business conducted by foreign entities are in place<sup>2</sup>; and

c. Underscores the requirement for travellers to comply with the BVI's COVID-19 protocols for fully vaccinated persons, noting that this includes:

- (1) Proof of appropriate COVID-19 travel insurance;
- (2) COVID-19 rt-PCR testing or approved rapid antigen testing for all travellers over age 5:
  - (a) 3-5 days before arrival;

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<sup>2</sup> As determined in relevant legislation such as, but not limited to, the Commercial Recreation Vessels Licensing Act, 1992, Cruising Permit Ordinance, Cap. 203, Immigration and Passport Act, 2013, Labour Code, 2010, Merchant Shipping Act, 2001, and Ports Authority Act, 1990 (as amended).

(b) On Day 4 for children ages 5-17 (other than day-trippers) accompanying fully-vaccinated travellers, conducted at a government-approved testing site or testing service; and

(d) On Day 7 for children that accompanied day-trippers on both legs of the journey, conducted at a government-approved testing site or testing service.

d. In short, BVI Water Taxis can operate safely if their owners/operators work with the relevant BVI authorities openly, and agree in advance to strictly adhere to set standards and expectations.

e. Non-compliance with the protocol may result in operator's licence to operate being revoked.

## II. Operations

Water Taxi Operators must:

a. Develop business specific COVID-19 Operating Procedures approved by the Ministry of Health and Social Development (MHSD), Environmental Health Division (EHD) noting that this must cover:

(1) Monitoring employees' health (including checking employees' temperature at the beginning of the working day/prior to departure and keep a record of all checks);

(2) Providing their employees with appropriate/approved COVID-19 PPE (e.g. face mask and gloves);

(3) Conducting and recording weekly 'briefings' with their employees to ensure that they understand the protocol (process, procedures and implications);

(4) Enabling online booking/e-ticketing/contactless payment;

(5) Working with port/terminal operators and destinations to ensure appropriate social distancing;

(6) Briefing passengers prior to boarding on the requirement for PPE and social distancing while on board/in-transit (which must be enforced by the crew);

(7) Cleaning their water taxi daily (before first run, between runs and after the last run) in accordance with COVID-19 cleaning requirements;

(8) Requirement for crew to:

i. **Not** disembark at ports outside the BVI, except for US customs and immigration clearance, in order to minimise contact/risk of transmission noting that this may require the operator to provide local dockside assistance to their passengers;

ii. Be registered on the Public Health Essential Workers Database and have up-to-date (valid) Quarantine Exemption Certificates to be able to operate regularly across an international border;

iii. Undergo COVID-19 (PCR) testing every 14-days unless fully vaccinated; and

iv. Be subject to an enhanced screening process.

b. Complete appropriate Gold Seal training facilitated by the Environmental Health Division and Tourist Board and delivered through the HLSCC; and

- c. Be inspected/approved to operate (including as an approved transport provider within the BVI).
- d. Ensure that all unvaccinated crew are subjected to twice weekly nasopharyngeal swab rt-PCR testing as coordinated by the Ministry of Health, Public Health Unit by calling (284) 468-4936.

### III. International Transfers

#### a. Operators

To deliver an international transfer (BVI/USVI), operators must adhere to the following:

(1) Arrivals:

(a) Ensure that passengers have been authorised to travel to the Territory (<https://bvigateway.bviaa.com/>);

(b) Submit a request to the Immigration Department (by emailing [immigrationinfo@gov.vg](mailto:immigrationinfo@gov.vg)) at least twenty-four (24) hours before the proposed transfer for approval. The request should be copied to the Environmental Health Division, HM Customs and BVIPA to ensure that the port of entry (POE) is aware/ready. Late requests, unless they are for an emergency transfer, will be denied. The request must cover:

- i. Port of embarkation;
- ii. ETA at the BVI POE;
- iii. Passenger details;
- iv. Crew details; and
- v. Vessel name.

(c) **Not** commit to the transfer until the transfer has been approved noting that Immigration and Customs clearances will be issued on arrival in the BVI.

(d) Passengers and crew may clear at the West End Ferry terminal, or any other POE approved for this purpose.

(2) Departures:

(a) Applications for transfers out of the BVI must be submitted at least 24 hours before departure;

(b) All water taxis must clear out and depart from the West End Ferry Terminal to minimise risk of congestion.

### IV. Intra-BVI Transfer of Quarantined Persons

If the operator is an approved COVID-19 transport provider, they can re-embark quarantined passengers and transport them to their final BVI destination noting that the destination's COVID-19 Operating Procedures would need to cover a water taxi's arrival and departure.

### V. Oversight

Given anticipated sensitivities (in particular the risk of a resurgence of COVID-19 in the BVI) the Ministry of Health and Social Development (i.e. Public Health and Environmental Health Division) will

work closely with key stakeholders to monitor and periodically review this Protocol to ensure its provisions are implemented effectively. Implementing partners include the Premier's Office; BVI Health Services Authority; Immigration Department; Her Majesty's Customs; Virgin Islands Shipping Registry; BVI Ports Authority; BVI Tourist Board; and the Marine Association of the BVI.