



Communication to Parliament

The Most Hon. Hubert Minnis

Prime Minister

Wednesday, 28 May 2020

Mr. Speaker:

Today, the Surveillance Unit of the Ministry of Health reports that the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in The Bahamas remains at 100.

Of these cases, 43 are active and 46 have recovered.

Currently, there are six individuals hospitalized and there have been 11 deaths.

The total number of confirmed cases identified per island are as follows:

- 78 - New Providence;
- 8 - Grand Bahama;
- 13 - Bimini; and
- 1 in Cat Cay.

There have been no reports of confirmed cases since May 23rd.

The current accumulation of cases show a slowing or a flattening of the epidemiological curve.

This implies that our measures of physical distancing, hand washing, curfews and lockdowns have been working.

Before relaxing preventative measures it is important to conduct a risk assessment.

Some of the factors that need to be taken into consideration during the assessment are as follows, the capacity to:

- detect a resurgence in cases;

- manage extra patients in health facilities or other locations; and
- to re-introduce public health and social measures, if needed.

The risk assessment must address the following questions:

1. What is the likely impact of adjusting public health and social measures in terms of the risk of case resurgence?

2. Is the public health system able to identify, isolate, and care for cases and quarantine contacts?

3. Is the public health system able to rapidly detect a resurgence of cases?

4. Is the health care system able to absorb an extra patient load and provide medical care in case of resurgence?

Indicators for the risk assessment are as follows.

1. Epidemiological factors, which include: incidence of confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases; rate of hospitalizations and ICU admissions; number of deaths; percent positive among people tested; results of serological testing (providing availability of reliable assays).

2. Health care capacities which include: health system (hospital and non-hospital) functions and capacity (admissions and discharges), health care workers, ICU and

non-ICU bed capacity, triage at health care facilities, stocks of personal protective equipment, treatment of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients according to national standards and crisis standards of care; health workforce.

3. Public health capacities which include: rate of identification and testing of new suspected cases, isolation of new confirmed cases, identification and quarantine of contacts, number of public health rapid

response teams to investigate suspect cases and clusters.

4. Availability of effective pharmaceutical interventions. Currently there are no COVID-19 specific therapeutics or vaccines. The World Health Organization, in collaboration with international partners, is implementing protocols for clinical trials to develop specific treatments and vaccines for COVID-19.

The future availability of safe and effective pharmaceutical tools will be important in coming to a decision to implement or lift public health system measures.

Mr. Speaker:

As the country prepares to “open up” domestically and internationally, it is important for us to remember that we are still in a pandemic.

Therefore, there is the need to continue to apply all preventative measures recommended for COVID-19:

- stay at home if you feel ill and have fever and/or respiratory symptoms;
- if you have a cold- or flu-like symptoms and think you need to see a physician, call ahead first to alert them that you are coming;
- frequently wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water;

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and then discard it. Or, cover your mouth and nose with your upper sleeve;
- practice good hygiene;
- avoid handshaking;
- wear a mask and refrain from touching your face.

We should encourage each other as family members, friends, co-workers, fellow-citizens and visitors to continue to do the same.

Mr. Speaker:

Because we are making progress, we are moving into Phase 3 of the reopening of the economy and the country.

Even as we reopen, we must remember that we are living in a new normal, in which we must continue to practice: physical distancing, proper sanitization and wearing masks.

If we do not collectively observe these measures and community spread widens, the country may have to revert to earlier phases.

Mr. Speaker:

I wish to now advise the House that the Monday to Friday 24-hour curfew is to be lifted, effective Tuesday, June 2nd.

As of Tuesday, a new and reduced curfew, from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., Monday to

Friday will come into effect for all islands of The Bahamas.

Weekend lockdowns will continue from Fridays 9pm to Mondays 5am for all islands of The Bahamas.

During the weekend lockdowns exercise will be permitted in your immediate neighborhood from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Regarding the upcoming Whit Monday holiday and Labour Day holiday, the weekend lockdown will apply to both days.

For the Whit Monday holiday, the 1st of June, and the Labour Day holiday, the 5th of June:

Food stores will be able to open for the general public from 6.a.m. to 7 p.m.

Food takeaways, drive-throughs and restaurants offering curbside and delivery

services will also be permitted to open from 6a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Effective Tuesday June 2nd, public beaches and parks will be open for use on all islands of The Bahamas, except for Bimini, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Harbour Island, New Providence and Paradise Island, and San Salvador.

Mr. Speaker

Worship services may now take place in the sanctuary on Saturdays and Sundays, between 7am and 1pm, on New Providence, Grand Bahama and Bimini, according to health protocols. This will take effect as of Saturday, June 6th.

Also effective this coming Tuesday, June 2nd, commencement and graduation ceremonies, funerals, and weddings, in groups of no more than thirty may take place with the approval of the competent authority.

Mr. Speaker:

All islands of The Bahamas except for New Providence, Grand Bahama and Bimini are to be liberalized for commercial activity, effective Tuesday after the Whit Monday holiday.

All non-essential storefront business operations on New Providence, Grand Bahama and Bimini, for example, furniture stores, clothing, shoes, jewelry, cosmetic,

and other miscellaneous retail stores) may resume business operations Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with essential staff required to allow the business to function, but with physical distancing and sanitization. This will become effective Tuesday, June 2nd.

I wish to be clear: restaurants, except for curbside and deliveries, bars, gyms, hair salons and barbershops, movie theatres, cultural facilities, and entertainment facilities

remain closed on New Providence, Grand Bahama and Bimini.

I assure restaurant operators, hair salons and barbershops that we are working with the National COVID-19 Coordination Committee and industry partners to finalize protocols for operations.

Mr. Speaker:

Exercise may take place generally outside of the curfew hours of 9pm to 5am Mondays to Fridays and is not restricted to one's neighborhood. This will also become effective this coming Tuesday.

Mr. Speaker:

Gaming Houses will be allowed to open with physical distancing and sanitization protocols, effective this coming Tuesday.

I wish to note, Mr. Speaker amendments to existing exempted businesses, the effect of which is to further reopen our economy.

The following professional services may now extend their operating hours to 5 pm, specifically law firms, Justices of the Peace, and real estate agencies.

Additionally, financial services, inclusive of accounting services, may operate with physical distancing and sanitization protocols between the hours of 9 am to 5 pm.

Now that the Government has liberalized non-essential retail, the following retailers may now open to the general public between the hours of 9 am to 5 pm, specifically suppliers of cleaning chemicals and fabric stores.

Auto parts stores, including mechanical work servicemen may operate on all islands Monday through Friday, between the hours of 7 am and 5 pm.

Mr. Speaker:

I wish to encourage businesses to look for new ways to do business. Businesses may consider implementing:

- online services;
 - curbside pickup and delivery;
 - encourage clients to make appointments;
- and
- practice physical distancing in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker:

As you are aware, Bimini has been on lockdown since 18th May, 2020.

There is sufficient food on the island.

A system was devised that those who needed food were asked to contact the Island Administrator, and a basket of food was delivered to their doorstep.

Mr. Charlie Wilkinson baked and provided bread for those needing it on the island.

Private donations were made that permitted the island's pantry to be replenished.

I have been told that many Biminities have utilized the lockdown period to improve their health, learn new skills and engage in spiritual devotions via Zoom.

Each morning the Bimini Christian Council conducts devotion for the community. There are exercise classes three times a week.

Theme-based Zoom workshops and seminars are held each day to keep residents busy.

They have discussed topics such as:

- National Insurance;
- Parenting;
- Study skills for young people;
- Cooking;
- Arts and crafts;
- Quality customer service;
- Talks for the youth;
- Men's health; and

- Women's health and Self-Care.

The police have noted that there are no major reports of crime.

Support by neighbors has been exceptional.

There is a strong community spirit.

If there is a need, an individual may call to the Administrators office and the matter is addressed.

I wish to inform the House that I shall be attending an online Bimini Town Meeting tonight via Zoom which begins at 7 o'clock.

During the meeting I will extend my gratitude to the residents of Bimini for their willingness to cooperate with the preventative measures and to encourage them in their resolve to complete the lockdown.

Mr. Speaker:

I wish to note that the proposed flight returning Bahamians and residents home, which was scheduled for Friday, 29 May, 2020, has been postponed.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised yesterday that the flight had to be postponed due to administrative reasons. A new travel date will be announced soon.

I recognize that this a great inconvenience for those who were booked to return home.

The health team responsible for this process has confirmed that valid COVID-19 test results obtained for Friday's flight will be honored for the next available flight.

Mr. Speaker:

At this time, international travel to The Bahamas will only be permitted by nationals and residents of The Bahamas.

Nationals and residents returning home are reminded to complete the following:

- RT PCR Test in advance with a negative/not detected result from a CAP (College of American Pathologists), CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments), COLA Inc, JCI (Joint Commission International) or similar accrediting/certifying body for the jurisdiction.
- Everyone should be tested, including infants.

- Tests should be within 7 days of travel;
- Test results should be sent no less than 48 hours in advance to the Ministry of Health —
covid19travel@bahamas.gov.bs;
- Test results should also be sent in advance to Bahamasair if that is the carrier on which persons are travelling -
covid19@bahamasair.com;
- Exhaust all efforts to get tests in advance;

- Bahamas Overseas Offices can assist in finding labs, using the web links provided by the Ministry of Health; and
- All individuals on arrival in The Bahamas, will be quarantined in a government facility or permitted to self-quarantine at their homes;
- To qualify for home quarantine, test results must be provided to the Ministry of Health at least 48 hours prior to arrival along with a request to home quarantine. The Ministry of Health will then arrange

for a team to do an in-person evaluation of the premises.

- The Health Travel Application Form and Consent Form must be completed and sent in advance to the Ministry Health at covid19travel@bahamas.gov.bs. The Forms can be found on the Ministry's website at covid19.gov.bs.
- The completion of these forms will permit the Ministry of Health to make a determination as to whether returning nationals should be quarantined in a

government facility or permitted to self-quarantine at their homes. If the forms are not completed, nationals will automatically be placed in a government quarantine facility.

The travelling public is reminded to carry out preventative measures as they travel.

- Practice physical distancing as far as practicable;
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Make sure you are up to date with your routine vaccinations, including measles-

mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries are still implementing travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines, closing borders, and prohibiting non-citizens from entry with little advance notice.

Hence it is important to check the travel regulations of a country before traveling.

Those working in the tourism sector are requested not to relax individual preventative measures and to remain safe and healthy in the coming weeks and months, as COVID-19 will remain with us for some time.

Mr. Speaker:

Countries around the world have asked their citizens and business to ensure proper sanitation, garbage disposal and other measures during this time.

We must ensure that we continue our sanitation and garbage disposal measures, including throwing trash in bins and not on the street.

International health personnel have expressed concern that the COVID 19 pandemic may result in increased rodents, and very aggressive rodents.

In this regard, to protect ourselves, we have further made it an offence under the Emergency Orders to dump on or otherwise

deposit or leave any litter in any public place or open space.

I remind the public that: “Any person, company or organization who contravenes any [of the Emergency Orders] given herein is liable upon summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten thousand dollars or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding eighteen months or to both.”

Mr. Speaker:

I thank the Bahamian people for their forbearance during this difficult time.

Because so many of us have worked with a spirit of solidarity, we have made tremendous progress.

But there is still a long road ahead in this pandemic, including our economic recovery and the social needs of many of our citizens.

In the coming days and weeks I will advise the Bahamian people on the national

food distribution program and what we need to do to rebuild our economy.

Just as most Bahamians acted in a spirit of unity in the past few difficult months, we will need this same spirit to rebuild our country after one of the most unprecedented events in our lifetime.

Let us continue to pray for discernment and God's guidance.

Let us pray for those who are ill and the souls of the dead and their families.

Let us pray for one another.

And may we always remember in gratitude all those who continue to serve on the frontlines during this time.

May God bless our Bahamas.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker.
