



Dr. the Hon. Duane Sands
Minister of Health

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

The Ministry of Health
Thursday, 26 March, 2020

Good afternoon,

Today I would like to provide you with our latest update on COVID-19 in The Bahamas.

As of Thursday, 26th March, the Ministry of Health has confirmed 9 cases of the virus in The Bahamas.

The first four previously announced cases are in New Providence. The fifth case is in Grand Bahama and had no significant travel history.

The most recently 4 confirmed cases are in New Providence. Only one has recent travel history. That case traveled to the Dominican Republic on 13th March.

All of the most recently confirmed 4 cases are in home isolation and are being closely monitored by healthcare professionals. They do not require hospitalization at this time.

The first case has been discharged from hospital.

Health officials continue to follow the condition of the three other COVID-19-positive cases in New Providence and the case in Grand Bahama, who all remain in isolation at home and do not require hospitalisation at this time. They are in stable condition.

Contact-tracing is aggressively underway by the Ministry of Health Surveillance Unit in New Providence and Grand Bahama.

The Surveillance Unit has already contacted the large majority of those who were in contact with the initial case.

The Ministry of Health Surveillance Unit will use an advanced approach to increase the number of contacts reached in the shortest possible time.

We continue to closely monitor patients in their home quarantine environment.

Contact tracing teams will be strengthened to support daily (or twice daily) temperature monitoring and change in

medical status that might require additional assessment by a senior physician.

We would like to thank our volunteer senior physicians for their service during this very critical time.

At this time, 175 people have been tested in The Bahamas for COVID-19 following agreed international protocols.

To date, we have 2,300 testing kits on the island.

We have 60 ventilators and more are on the way to increase the current capacity.

Thousands of PPE kits have been ordered to boost the supplies that we already have in stock. Three thousand are expected on the ground on Monday and an additional 4,000 will be here by the end of next week.

COVID-19 remains a very serious threat. More than twenty-three thousand people have died from the virus worldwide.

It is very important to address you today about prevention.

It is important that you listen to and follow this advice.

Ignoring this advice could lead to you contracting the virus, getting sick and dying.

Ignoring this advice could lead to the spread of it to your family and friends. They could get sick and die.

Ignoring this advice could put doctors, nurses and health care providers and workers at risk who are needed to care for the sick.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

COVID-19 is primarily spread between people who are in close contact with each other through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the eyes, mouth or nose of others. They can also land on nearby surfaces.

When you touch these surfaces and put your hands in your eyes, mouth or nose you can infect yourself.

Hand hygiene is crucial to success in the fight against the coronavirus.

We urge you to wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.

Washing your hands with soap and water, or using alcohol-based sanitizer, kills viruses that may be on your hands.

I am sure you know that the coronavirus seems to have an oily coating on its surface. And I am sure you know that soap and alcohol are very effective in dissolving this greasy liquid coating.

The actual scrubbing physically inactivates the virus so it can't attach to and enter human cells.

The water and scrubbing with your hands create more soap bubbles, which disrupt the chemical bonds that allow the virus to stick to surfaces.

You want to scrub, build up bubbles and scrub some more, getting into every crack and crevice of your hands and fingers, including under your fingernails, for at least 20 seconds.

Cold water works well but warm water with soap works even better because it makes a better lather and more bubbles.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective too if they are used properly.

They need to have at least 60 percent alcohol in them, and you must use enough all over the surface of your hands.

Rub it all over your hands and between your fingers until it dries completely.

Alcohol also helps break up the membrane of the virus and kills it, but you need to make sure it gets into direct contact with the virus.

While hand hygiene is critical, it is equally critical that you avoid touching your face – especially your eyes, nose and mouth.

Once contaminated, your hands can transfer the virus into your body through contact with the eyes, nose or mouth.

Additionally, make sure you and the people around you practice good respiratory hygiene at all times.

This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

Then, dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands.

If you have mild cold- or flu-like symptoms, stay at home. We do not want medical healthcare facilities filled with people who do not need urgent treatment.

Call your medical health professional or our COVID-19 hotline if you need advice. You can call the 24-hour Hotline at 502-7382; 376-9350 from 8am to 8pm; 376-9387 from 8pm to 8am, and toll free (242) 300-2619.

The call centre is reserved for COVID-19-related questions only.

If your symptoms escalate and you think you need medical care, please call ahead first.

If you have a medical emergency call 911.

A major part of our prevention strategy is physical distancing.

By limiting the number of people you are in contact with you lessen the chance of being infected, and we reduce the spread of the virus.

We strongly advise that you stay at home as much as is possible. I repeat, stay at home as much as is possible!

Do not invite people over. Do not have house parties. Do not go wandering around socialising.

The more you move around and the longer you move around you are going to feed the spread of this virus.

I cannot overstate this enough. Please. Stay at Home!

The purpose of the Emergency Powers Order is to prevent the spread of the virus.

When you have to go out for essential items such as food and water, or if you are an essential services workers, in as much as you can, please maintain a physical distance of at least three to six feet between you and others.

To businesses that have been allowed to stay open through the Order, you must ensure there is physical distancing!

Only allow a limited number of people in the establishment at one time.

Make sure they are kept at least three to six feet apart.

If there is line to checkout at the cashier, or a line to enter, mark out the appropriate physical distance people should stand at while waiting. Ensure patrons follow the rules.

We have allowed exemptions to certain essential services businesses to allow the society to still function in the midst of this crisis.

We need all Bahamians and residents to follow this prevention advice.

Our success as a people in the fight against this virus will be determined by how well we follow public health guidance and the Emergency Powers Order.

If we do, we will reduce the impact.

Fewer cases spread out over more time allows the healthcare system to care for the sick.

If we do not listen the virus will spread and more people will get sick.

Our healthcare system would be overwhelmed just as we are seeing currently in many rich and developed countries.

When healthcare systems are overcome by a surge of critically ill COVID-19 patients many deaths occur.

I know physical distancing can be difficult.

Humans are social creatures who need group interaction as part of daily life.

We are all comforted by our routines and seeing our friends, families and colleagues.

The Emergency Powers Order was instituted to protect us all.

During this period of physical distancing it is important we stay engaged with each other while remaining apart to prevent the spread of the virus.

Call your friends and family who you can't be with right now. Send them regular texts. Have video chats.

I want you to especially stay in touch regularly with elderly and disabled relatives and friends.

At home be engaged as a family. Go outside on your property and play games together.

Watch movies or TV shows together. Help your children with their schoolwork. Read together.

Work on home cleanup or reorganisation projects together.

Staying active and engaged and in contact with your loved ones will improve your mental health.

In these challenging times I want you to be as optimistic and as hopeful as I am.

With every Bahamian and resident of the commonwealth doing his or her part to limit contact with others, and to following public health guidance, we can win the fight against this virus.

Focus on doing your part to keep you and your family healthy.

Encourage friends and family to do the same.

Let us all remember that there are courageous and dedicated healthcare workers and other essential services workers across The Bahamas who are on the frontline day and night fighting to keep Bahamians safe, and to provide the services needed for the country to function.

They are providing us healthcare, food and water, electricity, telecommunications, security, other Government services, and news and information.

I say thank you to you all. Your sacrifices keep us protected, healthy, connected and informed.

Bahamians are a resilient people.

We have endured through hurricanes and other illnesses.

Each time we have faced adversity in our history we have persevered, we have overcome.

I assure you we will win this fight against this virus together.

And as I end, I implore you. Please. Stay at home!

Thank you.