



**National Address – Update on Covid-19  
Response**

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis  
Prime Minister**

**Sunday, 15 March 2020**

**Office of The Prime Minister  
Cecil Wallace-Whitfield Building**

**West Bay Street  
Nassau, Bahamas**

**8:00 P.M.**

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The Bahamas today confirmed its first case of COVID-19 here in New Providence.

We have been monitoring this crisis on a daily basis over the past many weeks.

This includes monitoring developments in our region and in our North American neighbors.

Earlier today I chaired an emergency cabinet meeting to coordinate the next steps in our national response.

As prime minister and as a medical doctor, the health, safety and well-being of

the Bahamian people are my greatest priority.

This evening I am speaking to you to outline some of the measures we are taking to address the country's response.

This includes health and medical measures, and economic, financial and other aspects of this crisis.

We will continue to keep you updated and informed.

Especially in times like these, reliable and accurate information is essential.

Fake news and misinformation can be dangerous and do considerable harm.

We will be strong, confident and vigorous in our national response.

Our response must be across the board and includes all of us working together to fight Covid-19.

The behavior and response of individual citizens, families, churches, schools and others is as essential as the response by the Government.

We are in this fight together!

I have instructed every Government Ministry and Agency to be in full preparedness mode.

This is our greatest national priority!

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Let me tell you about a number of specific developments.

Doctors' Hospital on Blake Road has been secured as a facility to treat individuals who test positive for Covid-19.

Those treating patients will utilize various protocols to protect themselves.

This facility will be secured by Defence Force Officers.

No visitors will be allowed into the facility unless authorized.

We are securing another facility for quarantine purposes.

Covid-19, was declared a pandemic last Wednesday, the 11<sup>th</sup>, by the Director-General of the World Health Organization.

As noted in a number of news reports, “The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says a pandemic is an increase in the number of cases of a disease, above what is normally expected across multiple countries.

“That means a pandemic is a disease that is spreading across the world -- typically

suddenly -- and affecting a large population. It has nothing to do with the severity of the disease or the number of deaths it causes.”

Given the growing public health concern and to protect the health and well-being of the population of The Bahamas, effective Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, the following travel restrictions will be introduced.

Foreign nationals and foreign individuals who have traveled within the last 20 days from the United Kingdom, Ireland and

Europe, will be prohibited entry into The Bahamas.

This is in addition to restrictions already in place for China, Iran, Italy and South Korea.

This restricted travel list of countries will be continuously monitored and updated as necessary.

All Bahamian nationals and residents returning to The Bahamas through any point of entry from any of the restricted countries

or an area where community infection and spread is present will be quarantined or be placed under self-isolation upon arrival and are expected to follow the protocols of the Ministry of Health.

Bahamian nationals or residents returning to The Bahamas who have been abroad and believe that they may have been exposed to COVID-19 are asked to contact the Ministry of Health's hotline or their local health provider.

Non-essential travel by Bahamian nationals and residents and other countries is highly discouraged.

Let me repeat this: If you do not need to travel overseas at this time, I highly urge you to remain at home.

Let me remind you of some health and medical facts about this virus.

Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough,

shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

Most people who contract this virus will fully recover.

But there are a number of people who are particularly vulnerable, including the elderly and those with chronic diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes, and those with compromised immune systems.

We do not know how long this crisis will be with us.

Handwashing is among the most important hygiene measures in preventing the spread of infection.

Standard recommendations to prevent the spread of infection include: regular hand washing with soap for at least 20 seconds, and covering the mouth and the nose when coughing and sneezing.

Cover your mouth and nose if you sneeze or cough by sneezing or coughing into your elbow or the crook of your arm.

Avoid unnecessarily touching your nose, mouth and eyes. You can introduce germs and viruses to your body this way.

Close contact should be avoided with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.

Hands should be washed before and after significant contact with any patient.

Alcohol-based skin disinfectants, designed for use without water, may be used in certain limited circumstances until there is access to handwashing facilities.

If each of us commits to following these practices we can limit the spread of this virus.

We must each do our part to keep our families, our community and ourselves safer.

If you are sick stay home, wash your hands regularly and stay away from large crowds and gatherings.

Many are asking what they should do if you think that they have the symptoms associated with this virus.

We now know that most persons who become infected will have a mild illness, and not require a visit to a health care facility.

It is important that if you think you are experiencing symptoms and need to visit a clinic or doctor's office call before you go so

as not to put others at risk of becoming infected.

Call your doctor's office or the Ministry of Health's 24-hour Hotline at 376-9350 between the hours of 8AM and 8PM and 376-9387 between 8PM and 8AM.

This Hotline is manned by health care professionals.

A nurse or doctor will take your information by phone and determine with

you whether you may need to visit a clinic for further evaluation.

If required, you will be provided with the necessary information to access further assessment and care at a specific health care facility.

Being prepared and being vigilant and proactive are key to decreasing the risks associated with an outbreak of this coronavirus.

We are watching carefully and learning from other jurisdictions, particularly the

countries that are best managing the outbreak in their country.

Let me tell you about some of the measures we are taking to respond to COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health has activated its national preparedness and response plan.

We have conducted training for healthcare providers on proper screening, use of protective equipment and COVID-19 protocols, and secured adequate supplies of

hand sanitizers, cleaning supplies and protective equipment.

There is in-country testing for COVID-19 at the National Reference Laboratory.

Businesses should continue to institute measures to protect the health of workers and consumers.

If you are sick, stay at home, practice social distancing and avoid crowds.

Large public gatherings have been shown to be linked to the widespread of

COVID-19 in jurisdictions now recording large numbers of cases.

Schools will be closed as of tomorrow, Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup> until Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>.

The Minister of Education will give a communication to the House of Assembly this coming Wednesday.

Out of an abundance of caution, all national sporting events will be postponed until further notice.

There is an indefinite suspension of all permits for use of public open spaces.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents.

We are still recovering from the impact of Hurricane Dorian.

This coronavirus crisis represents yet another risk to our economy and the country's finances and fiscal sustainability plans.

This crisis will have a growing adverse impact on confidence, travel, and supply chains across the globe.

This will affect Bahamian workers and businesses and will have an impact on the poorer and more vulnerable in our country.

I will be meeting and consulting with major business entities to get their input on our national response.

No sector is more at risk than travel.

This crisis will have a tremendous and widespread economic impact.

Tourism accounts for an estimated 50% of our gross domestic product; just under 50% of direct employment, and has a

cascading impact across the broader economy.

Another important fact is that over 80% of our stopover visitors are from the United States, which is reporting increasing cases of the virus and 75% of our visitors come by cruise ships, which are suspending cruises.

All of these developments signal to us the huge exposure our economy faces from the spread of the virus, which has already begun to show up.

This Wednesday coming, the Minister of Finance will address the economic and fiscal aspects of this crisis in more detail in the House of Assembly.

He will outline a number of the measures we are taking to deal with the tremendous economic impact of this crisis.

The Minister of Tourism and Aviation will also give a communication in the House of Assembly.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents.

On Thursday passed, March, 12<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Transport and Local Government issued a statement informing you that the government made the difficult decision not to allow the cruise ship Braemar to make a port call in The Bahamas.

After giving this matter due consideration, we thought this to be the best in the interest of public health.

Our maritime authorities were in regular contact with the ship owners and my government was in touch with governments

who enquired about the status of their nationals.

We are a small country. We believe that the ship should call on a port which has the capacity to deal with the Braemar.

The Minister of Transport and Local Government will provide a detailed report on the MS Braemar when the House of Assembly meets on Wednesday.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents.

This crisis is deeply worrying and many are understandably anxious and afraid.

But out of control fear will not help in this time of crisis.

There will be adequate food at food stores. There is no need for panic-buying.

We are also going to enhance national security measures in order to maintain necessary law and order.

There is a large amount of fake news being created by people who want to scare you.

Ignore them and stay informed via certified organizations and trusted and responsible news sources.

When people forward you material and you do not know who created it and it has no author, that is likely fake news.

Fake news will have you panicked with information that is false.

Again, I ask, please ignore it and do not forward it.

Tell your friends you do not want them forwarding fake news to you.

Listen to public health advice from professionals.

Get your news from reputable news services.

Listen to the information the Government and public health professions provide.

The world is experiencing a crisis.

It has wide scale public health and economic dimensions.

Our response as a country, as a people, must be unified.

I have already consulted with the Leader of the Opposition on this crisis.

I pledge to keep the Leader of the Opposition informed of the Government's response.

And I hope that if he has ideas he would share them with me so they can be presented in our policy discussions.

This is not a time for partisanship.

We must work to save lives.

We must work to keep people healthy.

We must work to preserve our economy.

Bahamians do not want to see their leaders attacking each other in a crisis.

It is my hope that the Leader of the Opposition and his party will work with us in a spirit of cooperation to keep The Bahamas strong during these times.

If we all try to fix the gaps, if we all try to come up with strategies to limit community spread, if we all focus on the health of our people, we will do better during this crisis.

My Fellow Bahamians:

Let us refrain from the spirit of negativity during this period.

Instead, let's focus our energy on what we each can do to stay healthy and help others stay healthy.

I wish to thank health care workers, tourism, port and airport officials, and public officers and private citizens, who are working as one to address this public health crisis, which will be with us for some time.

Government officials will continue to update you on a regular basis on the range

of health, economic and other measures we are taking to address the many and difficult challenges posed by the COVID-19 virus.

This disease is threatening our country, our families and our very lives.

This is a national fight and we all have a role to play in this crisis.

It is a battle for which must all be prepared.

We bear a personal responsibility for our personal health and hygiene and the health

of our loved ones, especially older parents and children.

As the coronavirus affects our families and communities, your Government is committed to fighting it at every turn.

Even as we prepare and pray that few Bahamian's are harmed by this virus, the economic impact of this crisis will be widespread.

We are fighting for our health and economic wellbeing at the same time.

As we put our faith in Almighty God, we must also have faith in each other as together we unite to fight this major threat to our health and our way of life.

Because we are discouraging large and encouraging social distancing, a national prayer service will be held via television.

Bahamians and residents are encouraged to participate from home. Further details will be announced.

Government agencies will continue to update you on a daily basis.

Let us pray for each other and let us pray  
God's blessings on our Bahamas.

Thank you and good evening.

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