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COVID-19 Update Press Conference
The Ministry of Health
Tuesday 14 July 2020

Good afternoon,

Here is the latest update on COVID-19 in The Bahamas.

SLIDES 1 and 2 (Epi-Curve Bahamas + Cumulative Cases and Death)

Today we can confirm three new cases of COVID-19.

Case number 114 is a female resident of New Providence with a travel-related history. She is currently in home isolation.

Cases 115 and 116 are both males of Grand Bahama and both are in isolation.

The total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in The Bahamas is now at 116.

Of that number, 84 are in New Providence, 18 in Grand Bahama, 13 in Bimini and 1 in Cat Cay.

SLIDE 3 (New Covid-19 cases, All Bahamas)

Ten new case were reported in Week 17, of which eight were in Grand Bahama.

The chart indicates that the peak of the first phase of the national outbreak was around Weeks 3-6.

The National picture provides insufficient evidence to suggest that a new outbreak may be occurring in New Providence due to a single new case in Week 17.

The Hill's prediction for New Providence to Week 17 indicated that two new cases could be expected, so this single case is within what might be expected.

SLIDE 4 (Epi-Curve Grand Bahama)

However, a different picture emerges from Grand Bahama which had not had a new case since the 4th May.

The new cases in the incomplete Week 16 of the outbreak in Grand Bahama represent a relatively large increase (eight) in the total number of cases confirmed on that island.

The total number of recovered cases is at 91. There are 13 active cases. Deaths remain at 11. There is one hospitalized case.

A total of 2545 tests have been completed.

Testing remains a priority of the Ministry of Health.

As of the 13th July, there were some 2050 tests completed by our National Reference Laboratory. 159 tests were sent to Lab Corp in the United States, and some 327 tests were completed by the Access Medical Laboratory of Jupiter, Florida when persons were tested on Cat Cay.

SLIDE 5 (Laboratory Testing)

Each case requires two consecutive negative tests to be marked as recovered. Until the case is recovered, swabs are taken repeatedly.

Doctors Hospital has launched its RT-PCR molecular COVID-19 testing at a fee and is able to provide results within 24 hours.

The Lyford Cay Hospital also offers RT-PCR testing.

Many have asked about mass testing of asymptomatic individuals in the community.

Mass testing is most helpful in identifying cases when there is community spread.

Testing will identify a case but this must be accompanied by contact tracing, testing of contacts, isolation of cases and quarantine of contacts.

This approach or methodology used by the surveillance team identifies any additional cases early, prevents the spread

of the virus, decreases the number of new cases, minimizes the hospitalization and need for ICU care. Collectively this approach would result in flattening of the curve.

We wish to bring to the public's attention that there were two individuals previously confirmed to have COVID-19, who passed away.

Following an external review conducted by local and international health officials it was confirmed that the deaths were not due to COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health has amended its COVID-19 dashboard to reflect "Non-COVID" related deaths.

SLIDE 6 (Newly Amended Dashboard)

This new feature will serve to classify a patient who was diagnosed with COVID-19, but whose death was not caused by the virus.

The Ministry of Health again offers its heartfelt condolences to all who have lost family members and loved ones to COVID-19.

We are happy to report that the island of Bimini has been given the all-clear as it relates to COVID-19.

The residents of Bimini should be congratulated for their dedicated commitment and sacrifices to prevent the community spread of COVID-19.

After experiencing a two-week lockdown, Bimini has had no reported cases for 59 days.

However, after 63 days of reporting no cases, Grand Bahama has had 8 new confirmed cases in the space of 6 days.

For the majority of these new cases, there is a related travel history, according to the data collected so far by the Surveillance Unit.

Dr Frank Bartlett, the team lead for Grand Bahama, will provide a detailed update later in the press conference.

With the full re-opening of international borders on the 1st of July, all travelers – domestic and international - are required to complete an electronic Health Visa at travel.gov.bs. prior to departing for The Bahamas or a Family Island.

Health Visa applications take up to 72 hours to process and should be completed with adequate lead time.

International travelers must present a COVID-19 RT-PCR Test with a negative result to enter The Bahamas.

The test must be taken no more than 10 days prior to the date of travel.

Test results must be uploaded in the Health Visa portal and presented upon arrival.

Any person presenting a test older than 10 days will not be allowed entry into The Bahamas.

Children under the age of 10 are not required to take a test.

An automated response will be provided once the application is completed. Individuals approved to travel will receive a green color-coded response, as proof of approval.

This confirmation must be presented upon arrival in The Bahamas.

It is recommended that all travelers interested in visiting The Bahamas review requirements applicable to each member of their traveling party at www.bahamas.com/travelupdates before booking a trip.

The travel requirements for Bahamians and residents returning home after being away for a period of 72 hours or less, will be amended.

Bahamians and residents traveling for a period of 72 hours or less will be required to quarantine for 14 days unless they produce a COVID-19 RT-PCR Test with a negative result upon arrival.

We acknowledge that travelers have experienced difficulties upon arrival at LPIA.

We are working on strengthening coordination between the ministries of health and tourism, and the departments of immigration and customs to address this matter.

Government officials are on high alert for cases of suspected forgery, tampering and/or altering of required documents. And are prepared to take action if necessary.

As more businesses re-open it becomes imperative for businesses to comply with COVID-19 guidelines.

The Ministry of Health recognizes that it is challenged to prepare policies, procedures, and regulations for every workplace in The Bahamas.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Health has published a set of recommendations for all business types entitled “Workplace Guidelines During COVID-19.”

This document will assist each business owner to determine if their business is ready to open and to function adequately in the COVID-19 environment.

The document features an assessment tool that permits each owner to determine whether their company is within the low, medium, or high-risk categories.

It also offers mitigation actions to permit businesses to comply with the recommended guidelines.

Business owners can now go online at the Ministry of Health’s website, click on “Workplace Guidelines During

COVID-19,” download the assessment tool, and submit to covidvirtual@bahamas.gov.bs. As the digital solution is finalized and fully automated business owners will be able to -

1. fill in the assessment tools online;
2. submit the information requested;
3. receive an instant score; and
4. obtain as suggested set actions for mitigation.

Business owners who receive satisfactory scores are issued a certificate that can be placed on the walls of their business to let patrons know that they are COVID-19 ready and compliant.

Certificates are valid for at least 6 months and can be re-certified.

The Ministry of Health has been working very closely with the Department of Environment Health Services.

DEHS will carry out all the necessary on-site inspections to ensure compliance and enforcement of the recommended guidelines.

SLIDE 7 (MAP Grand Bahama)

As the Ministry prepares to responds to this new outbreak in Grand Bahama, I'd like to invite Dr. Frank Bartlett to provide an update on Grand Bahama.