



Hon. Renward R. Wells

Minister of Health, M.P.

Ministry of Health

Minister's Report and COVID-19 Update

Press Conference

14th September, 2020

5:00 p.m.

Good Afternoon,

Here is the latest update on COVID-19, as of Sunday, the 13th of September.

The Bahamas has recorded 2,974 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Of that number –

- 1, 344 have recovered;
- 1,545 cases are active;
- 72 of those active cases are hospitalized;
- Unfortunately, 75 people have either died with or from COVID-19;
- there are 8 deaths under investigation.

Presently New Providence has recorded a total of 2,013 cases, followed by:

- Grand Bahama with 597;
- Abaco, 100;

- Bimini, 54;
- Exuma, 24;
- Inagua, 17;
- Berry Islands, 15;
- Eleuthera, 12;
- There have been 8 confirmed cases in Cat Island;
- 8 in Long Island;
- 7 in Acklins;
- 5 in Crooked Island;
- 3 in Andros;
- 3 in Mayaguana; and
- with 108 cases, the locations are pending.

There has been a total of 15,196 tests completed to date.

As I communicated in the House of Assembly last Wednesday, the COVID-19 response strategy of increasing bed

capacity, repairing health facilities and COVID-19 testing is ongoing.

The South Beach Acute Care and Referral Centre was not originally designed to admit patients with COVID-19 but can now accommodate 16 beds. This is an increase from 10.

The Legacy Unit at the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) has been expanded from 4 to 8 beds.

There are 22 beds at Doctor's Hospital West, and Doctor's Hospital East has made 5 beds available for COVID-19 care.

The bed capacity at the Cancer Association of The Bahamas in Grand Bahama has been expanded to 16.

Seven beds will soon be available for use in the Grand Bahama Health Services system.

Social Services is still in the process of relocating the boarders at PMH. The PHA can confirm that nine (9) boarders have since been discharged from PMH and have been

accommodated outside of the hospital. An additional ten (10) boarders are currently being tested to ensure they are Covid-19 negative and will be discharged once tests are confirmed as such. This process, as indicated previously, will allow for more bed space at PMH.

In a similar fashion, like the boarders at PMH, some persons are using the Morgue at PMH as a storage facility for their deceased loved ones. We understand that death and losing a loved one is an emotional and sensitive time. However, the Morgue at the Princess Margaret Hospital continues to be stretched to capacity as a result of the delayed collection of loved ones who have passed. Given the necessary restrictions due to COVID-19 that had to be put in place as it pertains to funerals, some members of the public are opting to wait until restrictions have been lessened to collect the bodies of their loved ones.

We encourage members of the public to arrange with a mortuary company to secure and retrieve their loved ones. We are also again urging the local mortuary companies to collect the bodies that persons have already paid them to transport to their funeral home of choice. The failure of these companies to comply will have to unfortunately result in the existing legal storage fees being applied.

At the Rand Memorial Hospital, Part A of the Restoration Project is on schedule for completion at the end of September. This includes the main entrance, foyer, pharmacy, admissions and pediatrics; also, the Infectious Disease Unit Cancer Association project, the kitchen and cafeteria.

The Container Operating Theatre Suites, Post Anesthesia Unit (PACU), and Central Sterile Supplies Department (CSSD), which are being funded by Build Health International and Direct Relief, are also expected to be completed by the end of this month.

At PMH, some of the ongoing renovations are slated to be completed at the end of September.

It is anticipated that inpatient beds will be restored to address some of the patient capacity challenges at that facility.

In country testing is being augmented on an ongoing basis with The National Reference Lab (NRL), the Princess Margaret Hospital and multiple private organizations now capable of providing COVID-19 tests.

Grand Bahama Health Services, like the NRL and PMH, now has a GeneXpert machine to aid their Surveillance testing. They began processing samples today.

The recently acquired automated RNA extractor at the NRL, is now functional. With processing of 24 samples at a time, this allows lab personnel to direct their efforts thereby decreasing time to result.

As you know timely receipt of COVID-19 test results greatly aid the staff of the Ministry of Health's Surveillance Unit and volunteer contact tracers in carrying out their duties.

As the Contact Tracing Strike force continues to effectively manage COVID-19 data, the public is encouraged to please give accurate details, especially telephone numbers and addresses, first to the doctor's office or lab taking the sample and to the members of the contact tracing team.

COVID-19 is with us and unfortunately that does not mean that all other illnesses and viruses have ceased.

In a few short weeks, it will be October, which marks the beginning of the influenza or 'flu' season.

The flu season lasts until March. Last year in the Bahamas, our healthcare system treated thousands of people affected by the flu or complications from the flu.

At this time, unlike COVID-19, there is a vaccine available to protect people from influenza. It is important that we all get the flu vaccine, especially during this time of COVID-19.

The flu vaccine is safe and effective and this is supported by years of research. Isolation of the first Influenza H1N1 strain in 1933 and the first Influenza B strain in 1940, lead to the first bivalent flu vaccine in 1942. The flu vaccine has been around for 78 years. Currently, it is recommended that all persons older than 6 months should get the annual vaccine to prevent getting the flu, unless specifically instructed not to by a doctor.

The flu similar to COVID-19, is characterized by symptoms such as fever, cough, muscle aches, sore throat and runny nose and a general unwell feeling. Illness can be mild or severe.

While it is important to get the flu vaccine each year because of new strains of the virus which circulate annually, this year greater significance must be placed on availing oneself of the

available flu vaccine. There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19 however the flu vaccine can provide protection for us from the current circulating strain(s).

Healthcare workers are encouraged to talk to their patients about the flu vaccine to educate them about the benefits. If you think you may have the flu, call your healthcare provider to get appropriate instructions on what you should do.

Along the same path of vaccine preventable diseases, according to the World Health Organization, immunization prevents two–three million deaths every year.

Immunizations are important public health tools for the very young to older persons.

For example, younger children need their immunizations kept up to date to ensure that they are protected from preventable diseases such as mumps and measles. Parents have a great responsibility in this regard.

Older persons should also get the pneumococcal vaccine to prevent pneumococcal diseases such as pneumonia or meningitis.

Getting immunized protects you, your family and the community. Immunizations save lives.

We know that adjusting to life with COVID-19, and health matters in general, puts a toll on us all, including our healthcare workers.

We value the personal sacrifice that our healthcare and frontline workers exhibit daily. We are grateful for the men and women who have worked extra shifts, volunteered and even come out of retirement to once again serve their country.

We are also grateful to their family members for sharing their loved ones' time and expertise with the nation.

As we seek to ensure that our physical health is safe, let us also pay attention to our mental health. Watch for signs of depression, anxiety, stress and insomnia.

Now more than ever is when people need to talk to one another, ‘check-in’ and assess emotions. The Mental Health and Psychosocial Services (MHPSS) Help Line Numbers are:

819-7652 816-3799 815-5850 812-0576 or 454-2993

Persons can call, WhatsApp or text.

At the Ministry of Health, we continue to learn more about COVID-19 as we traverse the waters of this continuously evolving virus.

We intend to keep the public informed and updated every step of the way during and after this pandemic. Whether by press conference, dashboards and press releases, presentations in the House of Assembly, webinars, television, radio and online interviews, please be assured that the Ministry will do its best to provide relevant information in a timely manner.

Our team is comprised of a variety of persons with various skill sets who are constantly planning, collecting and updating

data, researching and utilizing best practices, working around the clock to ensure that we promote and communicate what is recommended for the health, wellness and safety of this nation.

We thank those members of the public who continually pray for us, send words of encouragement and support.

We ask the public to continue to routinely follow the recommended preventative measures.

Before you leave your house ensure that you have a clean mask, your personal hand sanitizer and any other protective equipment for your safety.

If you see your fellow brothers and sisters not wearing their masks properly, not using proper coughing and sneezing etiquette, touching their face or being too physically close, respectfully, (respectfully, respectfully) intervene and help hold one another accountable.

When you enter an establishment two of the first things you should look for are signs that promote the preventative measures such as ‘no mask, no entry’ and a sanitizing station that you can utilize.

If you do not see these, speak with the business owner or manager and relay your safety concerns.

Plan your outings and make lists to help you limit the amount of time, or number of trips out in the Public.

When you return home, engage in your sanitizing process at the door and ensure that you safely enter your home and interact with your family members.

Health officials have intimated that this whole process will be with us for some time. If we work together and follow the guidelines, we will successfully overcome this pandemic. Let us all do our part and stay safe. May the God of all comfort continue

to bless and keep you and May the Lord continue to bless and keep the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

I now welcome our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Pearl McMillan.