



Statement

The Hon. Renward R. Wells, M.P.
Minister of Health

Press Conference: COVID-19 Update

Ministry of Health
Friday, 16th October 2020
3 p.m.

Good afternoon members of the press and good afternoon Bahamas.

Here is the latest update on COVID-19 as of Thursday the 15th of October, 2020.

One-hundred and thirty-two (132) new cases were recorded on Thursday, bringing the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in The Bahamas to 5,517.

There are 2,164 active cases. Currently, there are one hundred seven (107) hospitalized patients.

Twenty-three (23) additional cases have recovered and been released from care. Total recoveries are now at 3,201 which is a recovery rate of 58%.

For the past thirty (30) days, we have averaged 1.5 COVID-19 deaths each day. Three (3) deaths alone were reported yesterday. We remind the Bahamian people that COVID-19 is no respecter of persons.

So far, twenty-six thousand one hundred fifty (26,150) samples have been tested. There were five sixty-five (565) tests completed yesterday, 15th October, 2020.

I would like to point out that at the start of the second wave of COVID-19 in The Bahamas, a total of 2,540 tests had been completed as of the 13th of July, 2020. This number includes some follow-up testing on COVID-19 patients. Fast forward to yesterday's results of 26,150, shows that The Bahamas has ramped up an improved testing output of 900%.

My report of the COVID-19 numbers today you would deviate from our usual format. We have heard the requests from the community for changes to the way we present information and data.

To more effectively inform the public, going forward the Ministry of Health will phase in a more comprehensive COVID-19 Update, similar to the one just presented. The COVID-19 Dashboard in its current form will also be phased out.

We encourage members of the community to continue to engage us through our clinic and hospital community advocacy groups and via our Social Media platforms. Through community partnerships, we can combat this pandemic.

In addition to community partnerships, the Government continues to embark on a multi-sectorial approach to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

An additional 80 persons will be trained as contact tracers to assist in the vital task of identifying, contacting, and conducting further follow up work on contacts of confirmed cases. This includes:

- 10 Civil Servants;
- 10 persons from the Ministry of Tourism; and
- 60 employees of Bahamas air.

This will bring the total number of contact tracers to 111.

These new persons will be trained to assist with the vital tasks of identifying, contacting, and conducting further follow up work on contacts.

Also, to streamline our COVID-19 efforts, I am pleased to announce the reactivation of the COVID-19, 511 number, which went live yesterday, 15th October, 2020. This number will again act as the central portal for your COVID-19 questions, queries and reports.

Now when you call 511 you will have access to contact tracers and medical personnel. You will also be able to inquire about work and travel protocols and report violations of public health measures or the Emergency Orders.

Once you dial 511 listen to the recorded message then select the number that best suits your needs.

Throughout the COVID-19 response, consistent efforts have been made to increase the bed capacity at our healthcare facilities. We continue to work to ensure that COVID-19 patients, as well as patients with unrelated illnesses, have the needed space in our healthcare facilities.

Through numerous capacity building exercises the total bed capacity for COVID-19 cases is currently at 147 beds. This count includes New Providence facilities:

- South Beach Health Centre has ten (10) beds currently in place with a capacity of twenty-six (26). There is space for sixteen (16) additional beds underneath tents supplied by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA);
- Princess Margaret Hospital has seventy (70) beds;
- Doctors Hospital West has twenty-two (22) beds; and
- Doctors Hospital East has six (6) beds.

This count also includes facilities in Grand Bahama:

- The Cancer Association of The Bahamas has sixteen (16) beds ;
and
- Infectious Disease Centre has seven (7) beds.

Currently, a total of one hundred (110) COVID-19 beds are occupied.

Unfortunately, in our Family Islands, if a COVID-19 patient requires more than supportive care, they have to be airlifted to New Providence or Grand Bahama. Some of the hospitalized patients are from our Family Islands.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to report that the Samaritan's Purse international relief organization, under the invitation of our Prime Minister, has once again come to our country's aid.

Following the devastating impact of Hurricane Dorian in 2019, Samaritan's Purse established a field hospital on Grand Bahama, where the Rand Memorial Hospital and numerous clinics were drastically impacted.

They also initiated several additional projects on Grand Bahama and Abaco which aided in the physical and emotional recovery efforts of the residents on those islands.

Now, during this global pandemic, Samaritan's Purse will partner with the Ministry of Health and the Public Hospitals Authority to expand our healthcare capacity in our response to COVID-19.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I noted earlier, COVID-19 bed capacity at all of our facilities is at a maximum and in numerous other ways, our healthcare system is stretched.

The Princess Margaret Hospital is beyond capacity with 73 COVID-19 patients and 70 assigned beds for COVID-19.

To alleviate some of the strain, Samaritan's Purse will set-up and operate a 28-bed COVID-19 Isolation and Treatment Unit. This Unit will be located on the grounds of the Princess Margaret Hospital at the rear of the PMH Blood Bank, in parking lot "G".

This facility will accommodate positive COVID-19 patients and patients under investigation (PUIs) who require hospitalization. These patients will be admitted to the Isolation and Treatment Unit through the PMH Emergency Department and medical staff referral process.

In partnership with our healthcare workers, Samaritan's Purse will also –

- provide Infection Prevention Control (IPC) training for essential workers;

- absorb the cost associated with the deployment of the Unit and its support staff; and
- physical set up and planning sessions will continue throughout Saturday and Sunday.

The Government has committed to

- providing lodging, meals and laundry services for 30 medical professionals and operations staff of Samaritan's Purse at the Melia Nassau Beach hotel;
- full quarantine exemption for staff in possession of a negative RT-PCR COVID-19 test to allow them to work;
- additional Personal Protective Equipment, if required ; and
- consumables for the new COVID-19 Isolation and Treatment Unit.

The Unit will start treating patients as of 19th October, 2020.

As with post-Dorian operations, after six weeks, Samaritan's Purse will transition out of the country, and the Isolation and Treatment Unit will be donated to The Bahamas.

I would once again like to thank our healthcare workers for their compassion, care, skill, sacrifice, and commitment to saving lives and enhancing the health and wellness of our society. Thank you for your service.

It is particularly distressing when our frontline workers contract COVID-19 and it is extremely devastating when one does not recover. Last week the health community lost another hero, Nurse Sherry Bain.

I take this time to extend my deepest condolences to the family, friends and nursing community that had the pleasure of knowing Nurse Bain.

She was loved, well regarded by her colleagues and the contributions she made to the health system were valued. Nurse Bain will be sorely missed.

To all the families who have lost loved ones during this period, I also extend condolences and pray that God continues to give you comfort and strength today and in the days to come.

In this fight against COVID-19, we must remember our personal responsibility to:

- wear a well-fitted mask over your nose and mouth;
- be aware of your physical distance from others;
- wash and sanitize your hands frequently;
- cover your coughs and sneezes; and
- clean and disinfect surfaces regularly.

If you are feeling sick and experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 such as -

- fever,
- cough,
- fatigue,
- body aches,
- sore throat,
- loss of taste or smell,
- difficulty breathing,
- shortness of breath,
- chest pain or pressure, please call your clinic or healthcare provider.

Call before visiting your healthcare provider and follow the recommendations provided by the health professionals. You will be given the best advice to protect yourself, your family and the community.

Some persons may choose to avoid seeking medical advice and monitoring their symptoms. This approach is not recommended and can possibly result in worse outcomes. It is best to seek medical advice if you are not feeling well.

Again, follow the advice of the physicians and follow through with the course of care that has been prescribed.

Even if you are monitoring your symptoms at home, call your healthcare provider. We must ALL be responsible.

The same applies if you are caring for a loved one. Monitor their symptoms and if there are any changes, please seek medical advice.

We must be active participants in this fight against COVID-19. Follow the Ministry of Health's recommendations to stop the spread of this disease.

Community clinics are open. On New Providence, please note that although the curfew takes effect at 7:00 p.m. the Fleming Street

Clinic is open Monday-Friday 9:00 am – 8:00 p.m. The Elizabeth Estates and Flamingo Gardens Clinics are open from 9:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Monday-Friday. The Flamingo Gardens Clinic is also open on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We can do this, we can stop the spread of COVID-19 in The Bahamas. May God bless our efforts and endeavours, and may Almighty God bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

I now welcome the CMO.