



Press Statement

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

**Ministry of Health Campaign Launch
“Healthy Together”**

**Ministry of Health
18th February, 2021
3:00p.m.**

Good Afternoon, Bahamas!

Here is the latest national COVID-19 Report.

On Wednesday, 17th February, 2021, there were **10** newly confirmed cases of COVID-19. This brought the total number of confirmed cases in The Bahamas to **8,403**.

Currently, there are **2** moderately ill COVID-19 patients hospitalized in the Grand Bahama Health Care System, and there are no patients currently in intensive care. Notably these numbers remain steady for the month of February, but we are monitoring these numbers carefully for any possible signs of outbreaks.

In New Providence, there are **9** hospitalized COVID-19 patients at Doctor's Hospital. **6** are moderately ill and **3** are currently in the Intensive Care Unit.

There are **2** moderately ill COVID-19 patients being treated at the South Beach Acute Care and Referral Centre. However, there are no patients with COVID-19 at the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre.

At the Princess Margaret Hospital, there are **5** moderately ill patients with COVID-19. No patients are in ICU at PMH at this time.

In all, there are **1,023** active cases of COVID-19, and **29** persons have been recently classified as recovered from COVID-19. This brings the total number of recoveries to **7,148** for a recovery rate of **85%**.

Fortunately, there were no deaths confirmed yesterday. The total number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths now stands at **179**. **Fifteen** deaths remain under investigation. One COVID-19 death, to us in the Ministry of Health is one too many. We continue to pray for the families in The Bahamas who have lost loved ones to this awful pandemic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A total of **65,392** RTPCR tests have been carried out for COVID-19 in country. **236** tests were performed yesterday, with **10** positives and **220** negatives. **Five** tests were repeated to determine recoveries, and **1** test was inconclusive.

Again we thank our nurses, doctors, emergency medical services, other healthcare and essential workers for their continued dedication and devotion to caring for COVID-19 patients. We also extend our gratitude to your families who have also made the necessary sacrifice to support you in your position to graciously help others.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was on the 30th January, 2020, when the Ministry of Health held the first press conference about the novel coronavirus that is now referred to as COVID-19. At that time we briefed the country on our preparations to deal with the virus should it reach our shores. Later we experienced our first case of COVID-19 on 15th March, 2020. Would you believe it, it has been one-year reporting via Press Conferences on this virus! One full year!

My brothers and sisters, how have you and your family fared with the new normal? Are you tired of wearing a mask? Are you weary of physical distancing? Do you miss getting together with friends and family and to feel their warmth and the warmth of our greater community? You

are not alone. This global pandemic has lasted much longer than we all anticipated. There is a great temptation to let our guard down and ease up on taking the necessary health precautions.

Globally, there are currently **about 110 million** cases of COVID-19 and there have been **about 2.5 million deaths**. Notably, **8393** of these cases and **179** deaths are found in The Bahamas alone. Since 1st January, 2021, although our daily numbers are relatively small, we have seen some **504** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **8** deaths. With these numbers in mind more than ever, now is not the time to let our guard down. We must remain vigilant and avoid a possible calamity, a possible third wave.

It is important to continually protect yourself and others. It is easy for us to reason, “My family and I will not catch COVID-19.” Perhaps it may be because we do not know anyone who caught COVID-19, or perhaps the persons we know who contracted COVID-19 was asymptomatic and did not get sick or was hospitalized. We might also be reasoning that I only socialize with family members, and I know they do

not have COVID-19. My fellow Bahamians, we cannot be overconfident and think that catching COVID-19 cannot happen to us.

To help you and your family remain safe remember these three facts:

1. Life is sacred and we must all place a high value on life to protect all Bahamians;
2. We should always listen to the health authorities and the authorities in general. They have the responsibility to protect us; and
3. Do not develop a casual attitude. This can cost us our lives and those of our family members.

It is noteworthy to mention that at a Town Hall Meeting Tuesday past, the President of the United States announced that his country hopes to come out of the global pandemic by December, 2021. At this time the Government of the Bahamas cannot forecast when we will return to pre-COVID-19 conditions. We await the arrival of the vaccine to help us cope with the effects of virus. In connection with this, the Prime Minister will

address the Nation on Sunday to provide a full update on the COVID-19 vaccine.

Moreover, as we continue to face the new normal, we must aim to remain “Healthy Together.” Why is it so important to remain Healthy Together?

Well, many normal activities such as outdoor dining, fellowshiping at church and traveling have continued since July, 2020. Recently, many persons including Civil Servants who were working remotely or on a shift system, have been called back to work full-time as of 1st February, 2021. Whilst Government Schools are currently on the virtual platform, it has been announced that they will commence hybrid face-to-face learning effective the week of 22nd February, 2021. In fact, many private schools have already returned to the classroom to resume face-to-face and hybrid learning and schools in Grand Bahama have been engaged in face-to-face learning from October of last year.

With more of us in the same spaces, we must continually exercise physical distancing to remain “Healthy Together.” In this regard, the Ministry of Health is pleased to announce the launch of the “Healthy Together” campaign. This initiative provides members of the public with a source of information and resources about COVID-19 and how to promote and maintain health and wellness. “Healthy Together” is designed to be accessible and shareable by all Bahamians.

Since our children will soon be returning to school, we must focus on keeping them safe. Let’s see how we can do this.

SCHOOL VIDEO (30 seconds)

Staying COVID-19 free at the office is an essential part of slowing the spread of the coronavirus. Please turn your attention to the methods by which this can be safely accomplished.

OFFICE VIDEO (30 seconds)

[PAGE 9] My fellow Bahamians and residents, the “Healthy Together” campaign will take an evidence-based approach. It aims to

promote responsible behaviour and encourage a mindset change that is compliant with public health measures to protect our entire population. Over the next two months, the Healthy Together campaign will have a multi-channel and multi-media roll out. It features various graphic and video-based social media posts, television, advertisements, and articles. It also showcases an official website at healthytogether.gov.bs that will serve as a central hub for all health information.

(PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 GRAPHIC)

Topics covered by the campaign include general safety tips such as proper hand hygiene, cough and sneeze etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting responsibly. These recommendations should be followed daily whether or not there is a pandemic, but there is a pandemic!

(I WEAR A MASK TO PROTECT MY FAMILY GRAPHIC)

Also included is information about mask-wearing and physical distancing best practices, as well as population-specific advice for those with underlying health conditions.

(UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS GRAPHIC)

Non-communicable diseases are prevalent in our society and have given rise to specific comorbidities in our population. “Healthy Together” will address many of these health issues.

In addition to learning the symptoms of those suspected to be infected with COVID-19, attention will be given to our precious pearls – the elderly.

(60+ GRAPHIC).

Guidelines will also be given for public interactions such as fellowshipping, shopping and travelling. A topic that will have receive increased attention is that of Mental Health. Here is a preview of what to expect.

(MENTAL HEALTH – FAMILY VIDEO – 1 minute)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many persons are feeling pandemic fatigue after sustaining major lifestyle changes for so many months. The “Healthy Together” campaign serves as a vital reminder for members of the public not to let their guard down. The requirements of the new normal although simple can be burdensome. Again, now is not the time to feel perturbed by the requirements of the new normal. We must remain disciplined and not let our guards down.

Thanks to the Governmental leadership, acting on the advice of our healthcare professionals, and thanks to you and your efforts, the extremely devastating impact that this virus could have had on The Bahamas has not fully materialized. Moreover, our success as a nation depends on continued, collective adherence to public health protocols. As the country prepares to resume more services, let us keep focused on the goal of limiting the spread of COVID-19. Let’s take a minute to remind ourselves how this virus spreads and why it

is important to continue to apply the health precautions. Your mask protects me, my mask protects you, let's keep it on.

(EXPOSURE AND TIME VIDEO – 30 seconds)

So, remember my brothers and sisters to –

- Wash your hands;
- Maintain a distance of six feet from others inside or outside the workplace;

(SOCIAL DISTANCE GRAPHIC)

- Communicate by telephone, emails or virtual calls to keep the organization connected and safe in a shared work environment; and
- Have your hand sanitizer with you at all times even when coming out of the grocery store or going to church.

(CHURCH SANITIZING GRAPHIC)

(CLEANING HOME AND WORK GRAPHIC)

- Wipe down and sanitize your work areas frequently to maintain a COVID-19 free environment;
- Staying home if you are sick; and
- If you get sick at work or school, isolate yourself immediately and contact your healthcare provider.

(CALL HEALTHCARE PROVIDER GRAPHIC)

After months of virtual learning, the excitement to see friends, teachers and administrators face-to-face will be inevitable. In the excitement do not forget to apply the safety protocols.

(USE NON-CONTACT GREETINGS GRAPHIC)

- Instead of a hug or high five, bump elbows;
- Instead of sitting close to others at lunch, sit arms-length apart. You will still be close, but safe; and

- Remember sharing is not encouraged during this time, however, if it cannot be avoided, share safely by cleaning and sanitizing all objects properly.

On monitoring the behaviour of several residents, it is noted that many have congregated outside bars, restaurants and other social activities and have pulled down their masks while socializing.

Please be reminded that COVID-19 is transmitted via respiratory droplets. If you are congregating anywhere and persons are talking, laughing and smoking without a mask, you can still breathe in the respiratory droplets of someone in the group who has COVID-19. Whilst being outside increases the flow of air, it does not reduce the risk of exposure if people are not wearing a mask. My fellow Bahamians please, please, please wear your mask at all times.

The “Healthy Together” campaign promotes the health of Bahamians as we keep our economy open. It is just one aspect of an integrated effort for The Bahamas to be victorious in the battle against COVID-

19. No one is exempt from the effects of COVID-19. If we all work willingly in solidarity, we can reduce the spread of the virus transmission throughout our islands.

Today we also launch the “Healthy Together Bahamas” website which can be found at healthytogether.gov.bs. Healthy Together is a government initiative to consolidate and coordinate government information, resources and communication related to COVID-19 as we move into re-opening responsibly. On this website, you can find information about how the Government is combatting COVID-19.

There is information about Travel and Border control.

At the Community, Health and Wellbeing tab, visitors to the site can explore the factors that put people at risk for COVID-19, how to access health, promote mental well-being and prevent family and sexual violence. A tab has been also provided for resources and updates. Very soon another tab will be added that stores all the information about the COVID-19 vaccine in The Bahamas. As we move along, there are plans to have many more additions to the website in the

upcoming days. The website provides relevant contact information and links to Government agencies.

Through this campaign it is anticipated that all Bahamian citizens, residents and our visitors will engage in the measures that have been recommended for preventing COVID-19. The campaign will provide the information and the society will put the recommendations into action. When safety measures are practised at home, in the workplace, at gatherings or in the public domain the risk of transmitting or contracting COVID-19 and other viruses such as the flu, lessens with each measure used.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Within this global pandemic, there is an “infodemic.” According to the World Health Organization an “Infodemic” is an overabundance of information – some accurate and some inaccurate. That is what makes it so hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it. With all the advancement that technology has brought, along with the accurate information intended for knowledge and guidance,

misinformation or inaccurate information is also circulated, regardless of intent. Misinformation and disinformation intended to deceive can negatively affect human behaviour, mental health and pose a risk to public health and well-being.

When you receive health and vaccine information whether by email, social media, word of mouth, I encourage you to check the facts for yourself using reputable sources such as the Ministry of Health and Office of the Prime Minister website, and the World Health Organization websites. We all have a responsibility to seek and share the facts so that informed decisions and the right individual choices can be made.

During this pandemic and long after, The Ministry of Health will continue with its long-established practise of providing the public with science-based information.

My brothers and sisters, we all want this pandemic to be behind us. As we move to that end, be disciplined, be vigilant, take personal responsibility to apply the health precautions at all times. Let us all

remain Healthy Together. May the Lord of Life, our God bless you and your family and may God Almighty bless this great Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

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