



# **PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS**

## **Update on COVID-19**

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

**Wednesday, 1 April 2020**

**Office of the Prime Minister**

**Cecil Wallace Whitfield Building  
West Bay Street  
Nassau, The Bahamas**

**4:00 p.m.**

Good afternoon.

I wanted to provide an update on where we are today in our ongoing battle against the health and economic challenges posed by COVID-19.

As expected, we are in a surge.

There is community spread.

I want to announce that there are six new cases.

This means that as of today, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, there are 21 COVID-19 positive cases identified: 18 on New Providence and three on Grand Bahama.

The six new cases are all on New Providence. One of the new cases has a link to Grand Bahama.

There are 1,500 diagnostic test kits in country.

Aggressive contact tracing continues.

Health officials are following cases day-by-day.

Through GIS mapping we have identified hotspots on New Providence and

we have undertaken GIS mapping on  
Grand Bahama

to identify hotspots there.

We will be vigorously stepping-up  
enforcement of the curfew in hot spots.

This situation is constantly changing and  
evolving. So, we have to adapt and to act  
quickly and decisively.

The information we give the public will also change and develop.

We are working hard to give the public and the media the timeliest and most accurate information possible.

I want to address this afternoon the death of an individual who was transported from  
  
Bimini to New Providence.

First, I want to offer condolences to the family of the deceased, including to the Minister of Financial Services, Trade and Industry and Immigration, Elsworth Johnson.

We know that this is a very painful time for the family.

The Minister of Health and other health officials have spoken publicly on the matter.

The COVID-19 test came back positive. The family has been informed. Contact tracing has begun.

We pray for the deceased and the individual's family members during this very difficult time.

Let me speak to the difficult and challenging issue of community spread.



Our best weapon in this battle remains physical distancing and Bahamians and residents staying at home.

I want to thank all of those who are following the various regulations and guidelines.

You are saving lives and you are protecting your health and the health of others.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force continues to enforce the regulations.

Those who fail to follow the Orders and regulations are risking their health and the health of others.

They are distracting the police from other essential duties and they may be prosecuted for failing to abide by the regulations, which are designed to save lives.

I want to speak very directly to all Family Island residents today.

The Orders and regulations we put in place apply to all of The Bahamas.

I am asking Family Island residents to stay at home except for the exemptions within the Orders.

Please do not go wandering from

settlement to settlement visiting friends and family.

We have to prevent any possible spread of COVID-19 on every island and cay.

Except for emergency personnel, there is to be no domestic travel within the country by plane or boat.

Those who do not abide by this may place other islands and cays and Bahamians in danger.

They also risk prosecution.

No resident of New Providence or Grand Bahama should travel to any Family Island or Cay.

Likewise, no one from the Family Islands or cays should travel to another

island or cay, including New Providence  
and Grand  
Bahama.

Our greatest tool in the fight against this  
virus is following the public health advice to  
be physically distant from one another.

There is no vaccine for this virus as yet.

There is no cure.

The life in our Family Islands is very communal.

We live close together. We visit each other. We share common struggles and take care of each other.

But, during this crisis Family Islanders must make changes. Only go out to purchase necessities.

Only go out if you are an essential services worker.

Do not assume that it is not in your community because no one has tested positive yet.

Every Bahamian and resident in every Family Island must take the same aggressive distancing measures being taken in the more populated islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama.



Our advice and the emergency order are for the whole Bahamas.

Family Islanders, as your Prime Minister I need you to comply with these Orders.

I do not want outbreaks in our beautiful island communities.

It is largely up to you to determine what happens in your communities.

As much as possible, stay at home!

We are all at risk from COVID-19 no matter our age, what neighborhood we are in or what island we are on.

This deadly and dangerous virus that discriminates against no one, including young people.

Stay at home!

Stay at home!

We are in daily contact with the Family Islands to assess the situation on the ground.

Let me talk about our medical and health care professionals who are putting themselves at risk to save our lives and to help the sick to recover.

Every medical professional available is being called in to help.

On the frontlines of our citizen army fighting COVID-19 are doctors, nurses, medical technologists, hospital and clinic workers and others.

Let me be very clear and to the point, so far more than 50 healthcare workers have had to be taken out of the system because of exposure to the virus.

On behalf of all of us, I thank every health care workers throughout our country.

I know firsthand what they are going through.

I understand the stress and the anxiety.

But I want them to know that we will win this battle and that we are getting them every resource possible to win this fight.

I am extremely proud and grateful to my medical colleagues who are working around the clock and under tremendous pressure.

I also have two children who are medical doctors and who are on the frontline.

Let me say this to my colleagues and to the Bahamian people, I will do everything in my power to protect the health and lives of our health care professionals and workers.

Every health care professional fighting COVID-19 and protecting our general health are a part of the flesh and blood of our community.

As Prime Minister, as a medical doctor, and as a father, it my solemn duty to protect the flesh and blood and the well-being of our health care heroes.

They must be protected for their own sake and for ours.

We are working to balance COVID-19 care with regular healthcare.

Toward this end, I wish to announce an Amendment of Order 5 of S. I. No. 27 of 2020.

**EMERGENCY POWERS (COVID 19)  
REGULATIONS, 2020 EMERGENCY  
POWERS (COVID 19) (NO. 2)  
(AMENDMENT) (NO. 4) ORDER, 2020**



In exercise of the powers conferred on me by the Emergency Powers (Covid-19) Regulations, 2020, **HEREBY** make the following Order-

Subparagraph (1) (b) of Order 5 of the Emergency Powers (COVID-19) (No. 2) Order, 2020 is amended by the insertion immediately after the words “medical facilities, of the words –

“provided that –

- (i) All private medical and dental practices shall eliminate all routine and non-emergency physical encounters with patients, and shall as best as possible provide all routine and non-emergency services using virtual or remote means excluding private renal dialysis facilities; and

(ii) Where physical interaction is a necessity due to a medical emergency there must be strict adherence to physical distancing and hygienic requirements”.

To add to our citizen army and to help free some of our health care professionals for other duties, we are asking for volunteers to help the country in this hour of need.

A Volunteer Hotline is being set up to register individuals who are interested in contributing to this fight against COVID19. We will soon provide more details on this.

I also want to provide an update on various medical facilities.

The Modular Unit at the Princess

Margaret Hospital will be able to accommodate four additional patients with in a purposed built controlled environment

The facility has positive to negative air flow with 20 air exchanges per hour of fresh air.

The air is filtered throughout. Intake air and exhausted air is filtered and also treated with ultraviolet light irradiation as

further protection to ensure viral and bacterial kill.

Similarly, the South Beach Clinic is currently being modified in the same way to accommodate 10 patients in order to accommodate a surge.

There are also protocols at the various facilities for the intake of suspect cases.

We face two crises.

One is the Covid-19 pandemic that has claimed tens of thousands of lives around the world and that will claim many more.

The other is the economic crisis it has caused that will persist after the virus is beaten back.

Joblessness is on the rise across the globe and here at home.

The economic crisis is severe for The Bahamas.

Our economy is based on tourism.

The world has closed its borders. We have closed our borders.

Countries have had to do this to prevent the spread of a virus that has the potential to kill many people.



With no tourists coming to our shores now and into the foreseeable future, tough times are here and ahead of us.

This is one of the greatest challenges to the world economy in most of our lifetimes.

We do not know how long this will last.

But we do know that we will overcome this virus.

As we had to assume great authority through the Emergency Powers Act, my Government will have to make major changes to our economy.

Tourism, which has carried us so well for so long, is in a state of suspension due to the virus.

When it comes back The Bahamas we must be ready to welcome the world to our shores.

However, no one knows when that will be.

As a people we have to be ready to shift how we operate.

We have to be ready for generational changes to the economic structure of our commonwealth.

On the crisis assistance front, the Minister of Finance has announced two rounds of relief measures to help those hurt by the virus.

These measures amount to tens of millions of dollars in various types of assistance.

I urge everyone in need to make use of the initiatives that include food assistance, unemployment benefits, loans, and tax credits and deferrals.

We will also shortly be making an announcement about rental assistance.

To find ways to stimulate our economy now and in order to create a masterplan to rebuild our economy and to promote our

social development, I will convene a highlevel group of economic and others experts to provide concrete ideas and plans to the

Government of The Bahamas.

This group will help us to help chart the way forward for our national, economic and social recovery.

I will make a further announcement on this in due course.

Even as we fight this health battle, we must be prepared for the economic battle ahead.

Let me make some additional announcements.

We are working on supermarket schedule to reduce the number of people on lines and in stores. This will be released by the end of the week.

Tonight at 8pm the Ministry of Health will host a Virtual Town Hall focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health, Senior Citizens and Persons with Disabilities.

The public is invited to participate by sending in their questions via the Ministry of Health's Facebook page or WhatsApping questions to 828-1265 or call in at 502-7382.



This will be the first in a series of Virtual Town Halls that will allow members of the public to ask questions directly to health officials.

Let me just say to every Bahamian and resident:

Seven months ago Dorian was hitting Abaco, and soon to be over Grand Bahama.

Now Covid-19 has struck, sending death and devastation around the world.

We will only overcome through unity of purpose and God's guidance and grace.

Let us pray for both.

My life as a doctor and as a surgeon taught me about the need to maintain a

strong head, a strong spirit and strong hands in a crisis.

But I also need your prayers, your help as a part of our citizen army, your ideas for our future and your continued adherence to the emergency orders and regulations on every island in our country.

We will only win these battles together.

Thank you. We are now open for your questions.

