



National Address

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

19 July 2020

5:00 P.M.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Good afternoon.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still raging around the world and is getting much worse in some countries.

The world is still in a global health emergency, with some health officials warning that things may get even worse, and worse and worse.

According to the World Health Organization, the world is approaching 19 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, including nearly 600,000 deaths.

The highest number of confirmed cases is in the Americas, with approximately 7.3 million cases.

The number of deaths and confirmed cases continue to rise, with the pandemic much worse in some countries and areas of the world, including countries frequented by Bahamians.

In neighbouring countries, hospitals are overwhelmed and deaths are increasing.

For some places it is unclear when or how they will get this virus under control.

While there are countries that continue to make progress, such progress can be reversed because of what is happening in neighboring and other countries.

Progress can also be reversed because of how citizens and residents within countries are following or ignoring health guidelines.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Regrettably, the situation here at home has already deteriorated since we began the reopening of our domestic economy.

It has deteriorated at an exponential rate since we reopened our international borders.

As of today, July 19th, 2020 the current Bahamas numbers are as follows:

The Ministry of Health has confirmed 15 new cases of COVID-19. The total number of cases is now at 153.

According to the Surveillance Unit there have been 49 new cases since our borders fully opened on July 1st.

Thirty-one of those new cases were recorded on the island of Grand Bahama.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

As I have said before, our battle with COVID-19 will last for some time.

We are in a marathon not a sprint.

This is a marathon demanding discipline, endurance, demanding resilience and requiring determination.

This is a marathon requiring agility, a quick change of course when necessary and decisive action.

Like other nations that responded well at the outset of the pandemic, The Bahamas is working through the same balancing act.

We are trying to get Bahamians back to work and to promote economic activity, while also limiting the spread of the virus.

We are trying to open parts of our economy and our society while promoting and requiring health measures to protect lives.

The Bahamas is reviewing and being guided by what, in this moment in history, appears to be the most effective practices from around the world.

You have seen from media reports that quite a few places, including countries that responded well at the outset, have had to re-impose curfews, lockdowns and other restrictions.

Some countries for the very first time are requiring the wearing of masks in public.

This is the new normal for the entire world until there is a vaccine.

The virus is very infectious.

It is easy to catch and easy to pass on to others.

The world will be in this cycle of: opening up, reviewing community spread, and tightening up again for quite some time.

You must be prepared for this.

The Bahamas must be prepared for this.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents,

Our current situation demands decisive action, if we are to avoid being overrun and defeated by this virus.

We cannot allow our hospitals to be overrun.

Many priorities must be balanced, be they health, social and economic.

Chief amongst these though is the health.

We cannot risk the death of Bahamians and our residents.

We must be resolved in our collective willingness to save lives.

So today, I am announcing a number of measures we are reinstating to address the number of new cases we are seeing here at home.

My Government has consulted heavily with health officials.

We are taking these strong actions to save lives.

I understand the frustration and the disappointment of many Bahamians and residents that may ensue as we re-implement certain restrictions.

But as a country we have to do what is right and necessary.

If we do not take these measures now, we will pay a higher and deadlier price later.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic we acted early to prevent widespread sickness and death.

We must do so once again.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The series of measures to address the current increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows:

International commercial flights and commercial vessels carrying passengers will not be permitted to enter our borders, except for commercial flights from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union.

This will come into effect as of Wednesday the 22nd of July 2020 at midnight.

Bahamasair will cease outgoing flights to the United States of America, effective immediately.

To accommodate visitors scheduled to leave after Wednesday, 22 July 2020, outgoing commercial flights will be permitted.

Private international flights and charters for Bahamians, residents and visitors will be permitted.

Pleasure craft and yachts will also be permitted.

All returning Bahamians, residents and visitors by air or sea from overseas will require a negative RT-PCR COVID-19 test result from an accredited lab.

You will be required to present your documents to immigration officials upon arrival.

These tests must be taken no later than 10 days before the date of travel.

All of these individuals must also have an approved Health Visa to enter the country.

Bahamians and residents returning to the country who are not in possession of a negative RT-PCR COVID-19 test result from an accredited lab will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days upon return, via the Hubbcatt Monitoring App.

For travelers who do not agree to Hubbcatt monitoring or whose premises are not approved by the Ministry of Health for quarantine, they must quarantine at a Government-identified facility at their own expense.

At the end of the quarantine period via Hubbcatt or at the facility, COVID-19 testing will be required, also at the traveler's expense.

The Government will not be responsible for arrangements with private employers.

The quarantine period will be counted as vacation for public servants.

If vacation time is not an option, the public servant's salary will be deducted.

We are aware that the cessation of international commercial flights may affect students returning to or commencing college or university studies overseas.

We intend to address this matter in a subsequent communication by government officials.

While every family must make their own decision on students studying overseas, parents and students may wish to consider the resumption of studies beginning in January 2021.

Domestic travel will continue to be permitted.

However, I wish to advise that all travelers traveling domestically within The Bahamas are still required to complete an electronic Health Visa prior to departure at travel.gov.bs.

Any airline or commercial sea vessel that permits a passenger to board without the required Health Visa will face a fine of \$500 per passenger who is not in compliance.

I also wish to announce that on the advice of health officials and out of an abundance of caution, public and private beaches and parks on New Providence, Paradise Island, Rose Island, Athol Island and surrounding cays will be closed until further notice, effective tomorrow, Monday the 20th July 2020 at 5 a.m.

Restaurants at Arawak Cay and Potter's Cay will also be required to close, effective Monday the 20th of July.

These closures will remain in place until we are able to ensure that better social distancing can be practiced and enforced.

The Public Health team will monitor the epidemiological situation in New Providence as it relates to the number of daily Covid-19 Cases over the following 72 hours.

I must tell you, if cases continue to spike and increase, my Government is prepared to implement more restrictive measures.

This is not our wish. But if it has to be done it will be done.

We will continue to be guided by the recommendations of our health professionals.

Fellow Bahamians, Grand Bahamians and Residents:

Grand Bahama has seen a resurgence of COVID-19 cases after being Covid-19- free for a little over two months.

The increase in cases coincided with the re-institution of international flights and passenger sea transport.

Regrettably, surveillance teams have traced many of the cases to Bahamians returning to The Bahamas.

Because of the increase of COVID-19 confirmed cases in Grand Bahama, and after consultation with health officials, I wish to announce the following measures for Grand Bahama.

A new curfew for Grand Bahama will be implemented from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. daily, starting tomorrow, the 20th of July.

All public and private beaches and parks will be closed until further notice, effective Monday 20 July 2020 at 5am.

International and domestic borders will be closed to all incoming and outgoing flights and sea vessels to and from Grand Bahama, except for emergencies and to transport essential services and goods, effective midnight Wednesday 22 July 2020.

Ferry boat operations between East End, Grand Bahama and Crown Haven, Abaco will not be allowed, effective Monday 20 July, 5am.

Health officials on Grand Bahama have recommended stricter enforcement of social distancing and mask wearing, with fines for non-compliance.

To address the potential for community spread, indoor dining will be closed effective Monday the 20th July. Outdoor dining, takeaway and curbside delivery will be permitted.

Bars remain closed.

All Fish Fry's inclusive of, but not limited to Eight Mile Rock, Smith's Point, West End and Williams Town will be closed effective Monday the 20th July.

All congregant activities and gatherings, inclusive of religious services, weddings and funerals and sporting activities will not be allowed, effective Monday 20 July 2020.

This does not include students taking national examinations.

Grand Bahama has experienced an increase of 31 new cases over the past two weeks.

Health officials are closely monitoring this situation.

If efforts to decrease the number of cases are unsuccessful, other restrictive measures may be recommended, including a lockdown beginning Friday 24th of July.

Early identification of contacts is essential for mitigation and control of spread.

To enhance the capacity of health officials on the island in this regard, a seven-member team from the Ministry of Health arrived on Grand Bahama yesterday, Saturday the 18th of July.

This team is assisting with identification, testing and mapping of contacts for characterization of the epidemiological situation following the significant increase in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases on that island.

The health team is made up of three physicians, one microbiologist and three nurses who will provide public health and clinical support to the Grand Bahama team.

The team's assistance will include public education sessions, data gathering exercises, case investigations, contact tracing as well as sample collection.

I wish to make a strong plea to the residents of Grand Bahama to cooperate with the health measures.

If we address the current increase in confirmed cases as quickly as possible, Grand Bahama can return to a greater sense of normalcy as soon as possible.

Let us work together to get Grand Bahama back up and running as quickly as possible.

I ask Grand Bahamians to work in a spirit of unity in the battle against COVID-19.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

I wish to note a number of enforcement measures to assist in our comprehensive national strategy in the battle against this deadly virus.

It shall be an offence for a person to submit a falsified result of a COVID 19 diagnostic test or to undergo the test prior to his or her departure from The Bahamas and present the results of the

test on his return to The Bahamas as though the test had been carried out in another jurisdiction.

Such persons are liable to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to two years imprisonment or both.

Additionally, where a person knows or reasonably believes that he is infected with the COVID 19 virus and causes another to be exposed or infected that person commits an offence and upon summary conviction is liable to a fine not exceeding \$1,000 in respect of each person who has been exposed or infected.

It shall be an offence for an airline or sea vessel to permit a passenger to board the vessel not wearing a face mask and without an approved travel health card from the Ministry of Health.

Upon summary conviction, the operator shall be subject to a fine of \$500 in respect of each passenger in violation.

It shall be an offence for persons to leave mandatory or self-quarantine before being released by the Ministry of Health.

Upon summary conviction, such persons are liable to a fine of \$250.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The Royal Bahamas Police Force will continue to be responsible for the monitoring and enforcement of the COVID-19 Emergency Orders.

A new Enforcement Unit will coordinate activities to educate and ensure that all Bahamians, residents and visitors are

adhering to the enforcement protocols of the Emergency Powers Orders to keep our communities safe.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force is making final preparation for the COVID 19 Command Centre at the Cable Beach Police Station, from which all HubbCat Monitors, Dispatchers and COVID-19 Ambassadors will be controlled.

Across the islands of The Bahamas, the Unit will have 177 COVID-19 Ambassadors; 23 HubbCat Monitors; and 21 vehicles dedicated to this specific enforcement purposes.

The Enforcement Unit will also:

Monitor individuals in quarantine;

Ensure that the general public is adhering to the COVID-19 Orders;

Ensure that business establishments are adhering to the COVID-19 Orders; and

Monitor beaches and parks.

We will be doing everything possible to ensure that the health protocols and Emergency Orders are enforced, to limit the spread of the virus and to avoid further restrictive control measures.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

I wish to also announce that Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis will be stepping down as a special adviser and coordinator of the COVID-19 Task Force, effective today, Sunday 19 July.

Dr. Dahl-Regis has trained the health team and is confident in their abilities.

However, I wish to assure the Bahamian people that she will remain available for further consultation if needed.

On behalf of the Bahamian people, I thank Dr. Dahl-Regis for her outstanding service.

Dr. Dahl-Regis has put in place strategies, policies and procedures as it relates to managing COVID-19 and is confident in the team that will be led by Chief Medical Officer Dr. Pearl McMillian.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents,

I am pleased to announce that the Hon. Renward Wells will be sworn in tomorrow as the new Minister of Health.

Renward Wells is a doer, who knows how to get things done.

During my recent tenure as Minister of Health, I consolidated and brought forward a health care infrastructure program to upgrade the country's health infrastructure, which I

detailed during the recent debate on the 2020/2021 National Budget.

This includes upgrades to the Princess Margaret Hospital, clinics throughout the country and planning for a new Rand Memorial Hospital.

While the medical officials continue to lead the charge in the battle against COVID-19, I have instructed Minister Wells to move aggressively to upgrade our health care infrastructure.

He is also charged with working with public health officials on boosting immunizations and vaccinations for various childhood diseases, some of which have lagged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He will also work with public health officials to improve our readiness for a variety of public health threats including potential pandemics.

I am pleased that Labour Minister the Hon. Dion Foulkes will assume additional responsibility for the Ministry of Transport and Local Government as the new Minister.

Minister Foulkes has extensive cabinet experience. He has provided me with wise counsel on many matters.

Mr. Travis Robinson will be reinstated as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation, effective tomorrow Monday 20 July 2020.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

We do not know the long-term effects of this virus.

Do not listen to people who tell you it is like a mild flu and that you will be fine.

There may be serious long-term effects to people of all ages, effects that diminish quality of life, and possibly shorten life.

I want to thank the Bahamian people for following the public health advice.

I want to thank Bahamian businesses for enforcing the commonsense health measures.

We must wear our masks when we are out in public.

We must wear them properly.

Your mask should cover your nose and mouth.

I wish to remind you that it is mandatory to wear a mask or proper face covering in public.

It is not good enough to just have it over your mouth with your nose exposed.

Physical distancing is a key weapon in limiting the spread of this deadly virus.

So, we strongly recommend that you stay physically distant. When you are out, maintain your distance.

When you do not have to be out, stay at home.

And, of course, wash or sanitize your hands regularly.

Keep them out of your eyes, nose and mouth.

National solidarity is critical in this crisis. We must keep working together, standing together, supporting each other in every way we can.

Listen to the advice of the medical professionals.

Ignore the nonsense some people are circulating on social media and elsewhere designed to confuse you and to cause strife.

Our primary focus in these extraordinary times must stay on saving lives and limiting spread of the virus.

The better we are at this, the more our economy could open up and people could make a living.

This crisis is testing nations.

It is testing our people.

The countries that come out of this better will be the disciplined countries.

The peoples who come out of this better will be the disciplined peoples.

Countries and peoples who do not follow sensible public health advice and policies will have more deaths, sickness and chaos.

Bahamians are a resilient people.

We have survived hurricanes.

As I've said before, we forged in this spectacular chain of islands, the most dynamic tourism economy in the region.

We will get through this.

I believe we can continue to be a model nation in the world when it comes to our resolve and our response.

But we must do this together.

Let me also remind you that except for the new curfew hours on Grand Bahama, that the curfew hours for all other islands remain 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Let us remain united as a people during what is a marathon to save lives and to protect our country.

Let us pray to the Almighty for endurance, for strength, for wisdom and for guidance.

Thank you and good afternoon.
