



Dr. the Hon. Duane Sands
Minister of Health

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

The Ministry of Health
Wednesday, 8 April, 2020

Good afternoon,

Let me begin by providing you with the latest information on COVID-19 in The Bahamas.

Sadly, the Ministry of Health confirmed another COVID-19 death today of a 51-year-old female who was tested *post humously*.

I want to express my sincere condolences and those of our health team to the family of the deceased.

As of today, Wednesday the 8th of April, there are a total of 40 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in The Bahamas – 33 in New Providence, 6 in Grand Bahama and 1 in Bimini.

Today there are 4 newly confirmed cases, including:

3 in New Providence and 1 in Grand Bahama, ranging in age between 38 and 60. Two females and two males.

One case has been admitted to Doctor's Hospital West, 2 are in home isolation and one deceased.

Overall, the majority of COVID-19 patients are doing well. Some are very ill.

Sadly, we have recorded a total of 7 deaths due to COVID-19.

Five patients have been categorized as recovered.

A total of 394 persons have been tested for COVID-19.

Today we also share with you maps of New Providence and Grand Bahama of our confirmed cases shown in green and their contacts shown in pink.

With that being said, we notice there is still significant contact spread throughout the islands of Grand Bahama and New Providence.

Areas east of East Street in New Providence are still of concern. However, residents of the entire island should continue to take the necessary precautions.

In Grand Bahama, areas south of West Sunset Highway near Hunters, the immediate areas east of East Mall Drive, and Lucaya and Williams Town are of concern.

These maps are to inform you of what we face.

The deaths in The Bahamas underscore the seriousness of this pandemic.

Worldwide COVID-19 has killed more than eighty-five thousand people.

In an effort to prevent further spread and to save lives, the Prime Minister has announced a lockdown from 9 o'clock this evening to Tuesday at 5 a.m.

The only exemptions are for the defined list of essential workers.

The Prime Minister has also extended grocery shopping time on Thursday to 6 a.m. to noon for health workers, and police and defence force personnel.

Grocery shopping for other essential workers is from noon to 10 p.m.

Pharmacies are open for defined essential workers on Thursday until 3 p.m.

Our public health officials recommended this lockdown.

We are concerned about community spread.

With the shutdown and curfew too many people were finding ways to circumvent the measures.

This coronavirus is extremely infectious. There is no vaccine or proven treatment for COVID-19.

Our health team is constantly evaluating scientific literature and the responses of other countries.

It is clear that physical distancing is one of the best weapons against this virus.

Lockdowns work to force physical distancing.

Countries with the worst outbreaks have had to shift to lockdowns as the means to bluntly reduce spread.

The situation is that dire.

Medical professionals around the world are witnessing sad situations in hospitals.

People who contract this virus and become sick endure the process alone at hospital.

You are placed in isolation so as not to infect others.

Friends and family cannot come to visit.

If your condition worsens they still cannot come to see you.

Your final hours could be away from the people you love.

In order to avoid more deaths, in order for you not to be in intensive care alone fighting for your life, we are asking you to abide by the Emergency Orders and public health advice.

Be physically distant. Or let me say that in a more common way: Stay away from people!

For The Bahamas to win this war you must think of yourself as a soldier in our citizen army.

Your mission is to keep yourself separated from everyone else as much as possible.

For those who like to sneak out and break the rules let me warn you of who is out there: There are super-spreaders in our community.

These are people who do not appear sick.

They move around and spread the virus to large numbers of people.

No one is afraid of them because they do not show symptoms.

When you decide to have a party in the backyard, one of the people there might be a super-spreader.

He or she will laugh and talk with everyone. That person will mix and mingle while spreading infection.

From there you will take the virus home to the people you love – to your husband or wife; boyfriend or girlfriend; mother or father; to your children.

Your reckless and slack decision could kill your loved ones.

Young Bahamians: It is true that older people are vulnerable to this virus. They are a high-risk group.

We must look after our seniors but stay at a distance from them.

In nursing home facilities, COVID-19 can spread easily among seniors due to them living in close proximity to others. The impact could be severe.

Special precautions must be taken to make sure our seniors in established nursing homes and private care are safe.

Guidelines were developed and distributed to nursing homes to prevent COVID-19 from entering the facility; to prevent COVID-19 from spreading within the facility; and to prevent COVID-19 from spreading outside the facility.

Nursing supervisors have made contact with nursing homes throughout the country.

We are following and implementing the WHO Infection Prevention and Control guidance for Long-Term Care Facilities closely.

To protect the residents of nursing homes and seniors receiving care in their homes, we recommend:

- NO IN-PERSON VISITORS are allowed.
- All employees must perform hand hygiene frequently.
- Physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be instituted.
- Staff and residents should practice respiratory etiquette. When cough or sneezing, they should cover their mouths and noses with a tissue or a bent elbow to prevent release of respiratory droplets.
- Frequent cleaning of touched surfaces must be done throughout the day with hospital grade disinfectant or diluted bleach solution.
- All health care workers and caregivers should practice barrier nursing and wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) such as gloves, masks and gowns when they come in to contact with seniors. Custodian staff must also be protected.

- Nursing home workers and caregivers in private homes should stay at home if they are ill with respiratory symptoms such as coughing, fever, or shortness of breath.
- If a nursing home resident becomes ill with respiratory symptoms they should be promptly masked, and isolated in a private room. The facility Administrator should call the Ministry of Health's Surveillance Unit immediately.

For seniors who are at home, when permitted to move, take them food if necessary but please limit contact.

If you can, leave items they need on the outside so they can collect them.

This virus has claimed the lives of thousands of elderly people around the world.

That said, young people should not think they are invincible.

COVID-19 can kill people of any age group, any gender, any racial group, rich and poor.

No country has enough ventilators, personal protection equipment, hospital beds, or doctors and nurses to handle an all-out outbreak of this virus.

COVID-19 has collapsed hospital systems in some of the richest countries.

And when hospital networks are strained beyond capacity, more people die.

We need to limit the number of virus cases in The Bahamas so our system doesn't collapse.

In countries in the worst situations doctors have to decide who gets the remaining ventilator between those in a room full of sick people.

The one who gets it has a chance to live. The others have a poor chance of survival.

At these press conferences you have heard me say the categories of people at highest risk for COVID-19 are:

- The elderly, those 60 and older with and without chronic diseases;
- Those with chronic diseases – for example, people with hypertension, diabetes, kidney disease, chronic lung disease, including asthma, heart disease, sickle cell disease and the morbidly obese;
- Those who are immune compromised – such as those with HIV/AIDS, or cancer and those on medicines such as steroids or chemotherapy;
- Those who are pregnant.

Let me pause here for a moment and talk frankly with the Bahamian people.

Two in five Bahamians have three or more non-communicable diseases.

That means if a person contracts COVID-19, and he has hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, this person can die.

It is important to understand that COVID-19 attacks the respiratory system. It heads for your throat and lungs.

If you are unable to receive sufficient oxygen, your body's ability to manage conditions such as asthma, heart disease, hypertension or diabetes will decrease.

This means your body is unable to fight back and again, it can mean death.

I am taking the time to articulate this to you because as a nation, 47 percent of our population suffers from high blood pressure; 26 percent of us have diabetes.

My fellow Bahamians, The Bahamas continues to rank among the most obese nations in the region of the Americas and on planet Earth.

So it is absolutely essential that all those affected by some non-communicable disease, or who are 60 years old and over, adhere to these life-saving steps:

1. Take your medication and follow medical advice.
2. Secure at least one-month supply of your medication or longer if possible.
3. Keep a distance of at least six feet from others when in public.

4. Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing or when in public.
5. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based sanitizer.
6. Eat healthy meals, which include a variety of fruits and vegetables.
7. Keep physically active and get adequate rest.
8. Quit smoking and stay away from anyone who is smoking.
9. Avoid using coping strategies that involve alcohol or drugs.
10. Talk to others about how you are feeling.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can boost your immunity and help prevent you from being seriously affected or ill.

We know physical distancing is difficult.

You miss your friends and family. You miss your colleagues.

The Emergency Orders are in place to save lives.

They will only last as long as is necessary to keep The Bahamas safe.

During these times of curfews and lockdowns, it's important to maintain good mental health.

Although you should be physically distant to prevent virus spread, you should not live in isolation away from family and friends.

Call them regularly. Have video chats. Send texts.

Especially stay in contact with elderly and disabled members of our community.

Staying in virtual contact with friends, family and colleagues helps keep the bonds of community alive.

While at home, establish familiar routines.

Wake up at a set time. Have times for meals. Have times for work. Have times for exercise. Have times to go outside on your property to catch some fresh air and sun.

Use the time to plan and execute at-home projects and spring-cleaning or reorganisation.

Be sure to set routines for your children as well.

Set times for them to do schoolwork, and times to go outside in your yard and play.

Set times when they can watch television or play games.

Through having routines and tasks, you will progress through your day, reduce stress and feel less closed in by the prolonged period at home.

Those with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their medicines.

If the situation deteriorates, call your mental health expert.

In the event of an emergency you or your relatives should call 911.

We have recommended that you should wear cloth masks when you are out after this lockdown.

Let me explain why.

By wearing masks we limit the escape of particles when we speak or breath.

This will help reduce the potential for virus spread.

This is yet another public health tool, along with vigorous and regular hand washing and not touching your face, to make us safer.

Many of you have asked what you can do to help during this crisis.

I have a specific answer that's very important.

When this lockdown ends on Tuesday, please donate blood. There is an urgent need to replenish our blood supply.

This is a simple and easy way to save lives.

You can donate blood at the Princess Margaret Hospital Blood Bank. All blood types are accepted.

However, you cannot donate if you are sick.

The blood bank will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays during this period when we have weekend lockdowns. The last donor is accepted at 4.30 p.m.

Please bring a form of identification like your driver's license or NIB card.

I need you to make donations next week. I need you to spread the word that we need blood donations.

Our healthcare workers and other essential services personnel are on the frontline protecting us and providing necessary services.

I will never tire of thanking them for all they do.

They are caring for us when we get sick. They are providing services to keep the country running.

These are brave men and women from across The Bahamas. They are heroes.

Let us remember them in our prayers. Ask God to keep them healthy and strong.

This difficult period of lockdown comes to save lives.

This bitter medicine in the short term is designed to keep you safe in the long term.

Follow the rules. Comply. Stay at home.

If you, we will get through this fight sooner.

I want to thank the thousands of Bahamians and residents who are abiding by the rules and staying home.

You are saving lives. You are protecting our health workers. You too are heroes.

To those who still choose not to listen, it is this simple: By defying the rules there will be more virus spread, more deaths and more periods of lockdown, grief and uncertainty.

Let's be responsible. Let's comply.

Good afternoon.