



**Dr. the Hon. Duane Sands
Minister of Health**

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

**The Ministry of Health
Sunday, 22 March, 2020**

Good afternoon,

Today I would like to provide an update on the COVID-19 coronavirus in The Bahamas.

As of Sunday, 22nd March, the Ministry of Health has confirmed four cases of COVID-19 in The Bahamas. These cases are in New Providence.

Seven people are in a quarantine facility. Thirty-five people have been released from quarantine.

The first case remains in hospital in stable condition and is being managed in isolation.

Health officials continue to follow the condition of the three other COVID-19 positive cases, who remain in isolation at home and do not require hospitalisation at this time.

These three cases are contacts of the first case. The Ministry of Health is aggressively conducting contact-tracing

with people who were in contact with those infected with the virus.

COVID-19 remains a serious threat. The Ministry of Health has activated its Emergency Operation Centre as part of its strategy to mitigate the spread of this coronavirus and to save lives.

The Ministry has expanded its testing capacity. There are 1,750 test kits on New Providence, and 10,000 rapid test kits have been ordered.

Two thousand five hundred test kits are expected to be in New Providence by mid-week.

Our partner the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) is helping to build lab capacity and continues to assist in sourcing additional test kits.

COVID-19 testing is conducted at the Ministry of Health's National Reference Laboratory, which is internationally accredited by the College of American Pathologists.

It is the only laboratory in The Bahamas certified to perform COVID-19 testing.

The Doctors Hospital facility on Blake Road, which will be used to treat ill COVID-19-positive patients, will come on stream tomorrow.

To better respond to the public demand for information, at least 30 nurses and physicians have been oriented to man a virtual call centre.

You can call the 24-hour Hotline at 502-7382; 376-9350 from 8am to 8pm; 376-9387 from 8pm to 8am, and toll free (242) 300-2619. Additional numbers will come online in the coming days.

This virtual approach aligns with appeals for social distancing and ensures the workforce, particularly the health workforce, remains healthy and available to respond to the needs of the community.

The call centre is reserved for COVID-19-related questions. It is not for general medical questions unrelated to COVID-19. We ask members of the public to only call with COVID-19-related questions.

When calling please have your NIB number available.

We also want to emphasize that this call centre is not for medical emergencies. Call 911 for all medical emergencies.

On the readiness of the Family Islands, the Ministry has ensured that all working health protocols are in place for clinics and health facilities throughout The Bahamas as it relates to quarantine and isolation facilities, and assessment and treatment guidelines.

Family Island health teams are working closely with island administrators and other allied health workers, including immigration and customs officers, to ensure the health and safety of residents.

We want to thank the brave and dedicated health workers across the country who are on the frontline day and night fighting to keep Bahamians safe. We value your sacrifices and service.

I would like to recognize and thank our partners in this fight against COVID-19, including senior government officials, telecommunications professionals, and particularly the Bahamas Association of Medical Lab Technologists.

These brave healthcare workers need the help of every person in this country to fight the virus. We need you to follow the public health advice given:

- Stay home if you feel ill and have fever and/or respiratory symptoms;
- If you have cold- or flu-like symptoms and think you need to see a physician, call ahead first to alert them that you are coming;
- Frequently wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water;

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and then discard it. Or, cover your mouth and nose with your upper sleeve;
- Refrain from touching your face.

Follow the Emergency Powers (COVID-19) Orders announced by the Prime Minister to help reduce the spread of the virus.

Social distancing is keeping away from others as much as is possible. Effective social distancing is critical to us stopping the spread of this virus.

- Don't congregate at hang-out spots or on in the neighbourhood.
- Don't entertain visitors and family members in your home.
- When standing on line, maintain a 3 to 6 feet distance from the person in front of you or behind you.

Stay at home unless you have to go out for essential items or if you are an essential services or health worker.

If you must leave home for essential items and emergency services, maintain at least a three-foot distance between you and others.

We need each Bahamian to help save lives by following this advice.

By unnecessarily moving around in the community you could contract this virus and spread it to your friends and family.

By following the public health and social distancing advice each Bahamian can help save lives.

The success to which The Bahamas controls this pandemic is not dependent on just the health sector response but on each and every one of us doing our part. From the youngest child to the oldest citizen. We all have a role to play in preventing the spread of this deadly virus.

Information is critical. I would also like to remind the public to get your information about the virus from official Government sources and reputable and trusted media.

Thank you.