



# **NATIONAL ADDRESS**

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

**Prime Minister**

**17 May 2020**

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Good afternoon.

We are continuing to make progress in containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Because we acted quickly and decisively as a country and used a broad range of measures, we have been able to limit the spread of the deadly virus.

To date, there remain 96 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in The Bahamas. This

includes 74 in New Providence, 8 in Grand Bahama, 13 in Bimini and 1 in Cat Cay.

The Ministry of Health reported no additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 today. It has been four days since a confirmed case of COVID-19 has been reported.

The number of recovered cases is at 42. Active cases are at 43. There are 7 hospitalized cases.

The number of COVID-19 related deaths remain at 11. One thousand eight-hundred

and fourteen (1,814) tests have been completed.

But we must continue to remain vigilant in order to secure our progress and to limit community spread.

As a small country we cannot allow our health system to be overwhelmed.

We must continue to practice physical distancing, wearing face masks and washing our hands often and thoroughly.

We must also continue aggressive contact tracing, quarantines and various curfew and lockdown measures.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

As we continue to make progress, we will act on the advice of health officials on the phased and gradual reopening of various islands and certain areas of our economy, as well as a new normal for daily life that will be with us for some time.

We must abide by regional and global health protocols as we reopen our economy and society.

I again note, if advised by health officials, we will return to certain phases or re-impose certain restrictions in order to limit community spread.

I fully understand the anxiety and frustration of many Bahamians and residents to reopen our economy.

But we must act with prudence and good judgement.

We have to balance the health, economic and social needs of citizens and residents.

As you know, we are still in Phase 1B of the national reopening plan, but we have started to introduce components of Phase 2 as the country fully transitions into the second phase of the plan.

I am pleased to announce that Cat Island, Long Island, Abaco and Andros will

now be able to resume commercial activity effective Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup>.

Let me reemphasize to all of the Family Islands that are able to resume commercial activity that weekday curfews and weekend lockdown measures still remain in place, as do physical distancing measures and the requirement to wear masks.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

We all are eager to see our economy open up fully to travel for Bahamians and to welcome visitors back to our shores.

The Government is well advanced in our planning for the beginning of the re-opening of our tourism sector and to allow for travel in and out of the Bahamas.

Our resorts, our airports and our seaports are finalizing the health and safety protocols

that will be necessary for us to provide for a re-opening.

Taking into account what is being done within the region and around the world, these extensive guidelines will be designed to provide for reasonable assurance that travel and leisure are generally safe.

Any such re-opening to commercial-scale traffic will also be dependent on the ongoing stabilization of the COVID-19 outbreak in the Bahamas.

It will also only be applied to those islands where the outbreak has been contained.

As of now, we are looking at a possible opening date for commercial travel on or before July 1<sup>st</sup>.

These dates may change depending on the circumstances.

I want to repeat however that this date is not final.

It will be adjusted if we see a deterioration in the COVID-19 infection trends or if we determine that the protocols and procedures are not in place sufficiently to warrant an opening.

Our opening will depend on your cooperation.

I also wish to note that construction companies on New Providence and Grand Bahama may now operate on Saturdays from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

To facilitate hurricane preparedness, home and hardware stores will now be allowed to operate in-store hours on Mondays, 8am to 8pm.

This is in addition to the Wednesday and Friday in-store hours that home and hardware stores are currently allowed to operate.

The operating hours also apply to manufacturers of hurricane-proof windows and other hurricane-related products.

Curbside and delivery services may continue as previously outlined in Phase 1B.

Pharmacies may now operate from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday for the general public, and Saturday 9am to 5pm for essential workers only.

Also, exercise measures have been further relaxed during the weekend lockdowns.

Exercise may now take place on Saturday and Sunday from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. in one's immediate neighbourhood.

On those Family Islands allowed to resume commercial activity, residents will be allowed to catch crabs for themselves and for sale during the evenings of weekday curfew and weekend lockdowns.

As a reminder, those islands include: Cat Island, Long Island, Abaco, Andros,

Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins, Long Cay, Rum Cay and Ragged Island.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The Government is about to begin a gradual re-opening of inter-island travel.

The Ministry of Health has developed a policy and protocol for the approval and monitoring of individuals traveling to islands that have resumed normal commercial activity.

This policy and protocol will require individuals to register with the Ministry of Health by emailing [covid19travel@bahamas.gov.bs](mailto:covid19travel@bahamas.gov.bs).

Individuals must also submit to an evaluation by a Ministry of Health-authorized physician, in the public or private sector.

This evaluation will include a risk assessment via a questionnaire to determine the individual's level of risk for COVID-19 infection, plus or minus a physical exam to

determine the presence of any symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

If deemed low risk and the physical exam does not reveal any symptoms, it is expected that the person will be issued a COVID-19 Authorization Travel Card that will allow travel to the Family Island.

If the individual is deemed a higher risk or has symptoms that may be consistent with COVID-19, the individual will be referred for

testing to definitively determine their COVID-19 status.

However, the healthcare provider may still decide that a person who is low risk may need to be tested for COVID-19.

Individuals travelling on behalf of their workplace will be subjected to similar requirements.

To facilitate these arrangements, the Ministry of Health is collaborating closely with the Civil Aviation Authority.

Policies and procedures have been developed to enhance communication between the two organisations for decisions regarding:

- who can travel; and
- where they can travel in the Family Islands or Grand Bahama.

In the first phase of this inter-island travel, residents of cleared Family Islands who are trapped in New Providence or Grand Bahama may travel back home after going through the process outlined.

Individuals may start applying beginning this coming Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup>.

Once cleared for travel, each traveler must present the COVID-19 Travel

Authorization Card to the relevant ticket agent.

The Card grants approval from the Ministry of Health for inter-island travel. Each person must also present a Government-issued ID.

Residents of the cleared Family Islands may travel between those islands by plane or boat.

For example, a resident of Long Island may travel to Cat Island or any other island included on the list. These residents may travel without a COVID-19 travel authorization card.

Those on the Family Islands cleared for commercial activity may also travel to New Providence and Grand Bahama. But in order to return to their respective islands they must complete the procedures and processes outlined earlier.

## Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

There are a large number of pleasure craft that have been anchored offshore in Bahamian waters for well beyond 14 days.

These boaters will be allowed to come ashore to conduct routine business, while practicing physical distancing protocols.

The repatriation of Bahamians from overseas will resume this week. The system has been streamlined in order to avoid what happened during the last

exercise, when a passenger who had a COVID-19 positive result overseas was allowed to board a return flight home.

Subsequent testing by the Ministry of Health following the passenger's arrival has shown this individual is now COVID-19 negative.

Two repatriation exercises are scheduled for this coming week from Ft. Lauderdale into New Providence.

There will be a flight this Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup> and one on Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

A flight to Grand Bahama will be accommodated if necessary.

Those who are seeking to return home through this repatriation exercise and who meet the required protocols, including a COVID-19 negative test, may book directly through Bahamasair.

Those who already have a return ticket on Bahamasair should call the airline's ticket office between 9am and 5pm starting Monday.

Passengers will be required to present the COVID-19 negative test result to a Bahamasair agent before being allowed to board the aircraft.

A representative from the Counsel General will be present to validate the test result.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

I wish to remind the residents of Bimini that a complete lockdown will take effect beginning tomorrow, Monday, May, 18<sup>th</sup> at 9 p.m. until Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> at midnight.

As I noted on Thursday past, this lockdown is being implemented to slow and control the community spread of the COVID-19 virus in these areas.

I want to reassure residents of Bimini that there will be sufficient food and supplies on the island during the lockdown period.

Groceries and supplies arrived in Bimini over the weekend by boat to re-stock food stores in advance of the lockdown.

The Department of Social Services distributed 600 food vouchers on Friday past to ensure residents in need had the

necessary resources to purchase food before Monday.

The Government's National Food Distribution Task Force has also coordinated the delivery of 100 food packages through the Bahamas Feeding Network, to Bimini.

Additional food packages will be delivered before the end of the lockdown.

During the lockdown period, a team of 12 volunteers will assist the island Administrator

with checking-in and assessing residents in need of assistance.

This group will also help to manage the food pantry on the island.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force has agreed to provide escort service for the Administrator and her team as needed.

Boats carrying food and supplies will also be allowed to call on Bimini during the

lockdown period to ensure food stores are re-stocked after the lockdown ends.

I have communicated this morning with the island Administrator and she has reported that the island is doing well.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

This pandemic has claimed the lives of more than three hundred thousand people around the world. The scenes from around the world are heartbreaking.

Other countries have faced daily death tolls near one thousand.

Their current death counts are in the tens of thousands.

This pandemic has resulted in the worst economic downturn since the era of the Great Depression.

Thankfully, due to the wise counsel of our public health team, the hard work of our essential workers, and the compliance of the majority of Bahamians, we have had a better

health outcome than many countries during this crisis.

Just as we summoned the nation's health professionals to confront this disease, we are summoning other citizens and residents of expertise and goodwill to address the many difficult economic and social consequences of COVID-19.

We must remain united in purpose.

This is not the time for division.

This is a time for solidarity and kindness, especially toward those in greatest need.

Let us be a community of compassion. Do what you can to help others.

I thank all of you who have complied with the various emergency orders and public health advice.

Though the challenges before us are many, we are making plans to get through this together.

Every day, along with my colleagues, we dedicate ourselves to developing solutions and policies to the challenges ahead.

I deeply appreciate the advice and counsel of so many of you.

Let us continue to pray for each other.

May God continue to bless our Commonwealth and all of those who continue to offer their dedication and devotion to our Bahamas.

Thank you and good evening.

