



House of Assembly Communication

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

**Wednesday, 7 October 2020
Nassau, Bahamas**

Mr. Speaker:

In my national address this past Sunday I advised the country on the situation we currently face in the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains a dangerous and deadly threat to the entire world and to our Bahamas.

I am encouraged with the progress in Grand Bahama and most of our Family Islands.

Virus numbers are low in these places.

Therefore, regular life and businesses can proceed with greater normalcy.

Residents on these islands are to be commended.

I highly encourage the residents of Grand Bahama and the Family Islands to keep complying with the public health advice of mask wearing, physical distancing and proper sanitization.

The more they do so the more they will be able to live with few restrictions.

However, Mr. Speaker: We face urgent challenges here on New Providence and Abaco.

The persistently high case numbers – particularly on New Providence – have placed immense strain on our healthcare system and our medical professionals.

Our hospitals are full.

Medical teams have been pushed to their capacity.

If there is further deterioration in the COVID-19 situation on our most populated island we risk a collapse of the healthcare system.

Mr. Speaker:

My Government uses science and data and listens carefully to the recommendations of experts to guide our policies.

We also consult with various stakeholders to get their feedback and to discuss the policies we are considering.

This is the worst crisis The Bahamas has faced in its modern history.

We are living in an unprecedented global emergency.

Each day is an emergency and we have to constantly make adjustments, day in and day out, sometimes, on an hourly basis.

This is going to be our reality for some time.

Anyone who tells you otherwise does not understand this moment in history.

Today, the current situation in New Providence and Abaco requires new restrictions in order to reduce infections and, most importantly, to save lives.

Sadly, we are now averaging one death per day.

In deciding on these restrictions, we have balanced the need of our people to make a living, along with the serious public health concerns of the moment.

Nobody likes or wants complete shutdowns or full restrictions.

We seek to implement what is reasonable and necessary for a period of time in order to reduce sickness and death.

When these goals are achieved and cases are reduced, we remove these measures so that people may get back to a greater level of normalcy in their lives and livelihoods.

We know that restrictions are hard on family life; they're hard on businesses and people's finances; they're hard on everyone's mental health.

However, restrictions are needed now on New Providence and Abaco in order to address the current situation.

Yesterday, the Cabinet had a special briefing from the Pan-American Health Organization and World Health Organization representative to the Bahamas, the Government's Health Consultant and representatives of the Ministry of Health.

The Leader of the Opposition and his team were invited to attend this briefing but declined to do so.

Mr. Speaker:

In order to balance the health, economic and social needs of the country at this time, the Cabinet has agreed to a variety of measures for New Providence and Abaco.

The measures we are taking are multi-dimensional, and include enforcement of regulations, as well as encouragement and ongoing public education.

But the greatest measure is still individual responsibility!

Just as we are individually responsible for our personal health, in terms of what we eat, exercise and other good habits, we are responsible for wearing masks and following other guidelines.

But because COVID-19 is very contagious, we also have an individual moral and civic responsibility to protect other people from catching the virus from us.

I remind the House that one in 100 residents of New Providence have now been infected by COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker:

I would like to inform the House and the Bahamian people of these measures, which are designed and targeted to reduce and control the spread of COVID-19 on New Providence and Abaco.

The following provisions will take effect on Friday, the 9th of October 2020 at 7 p.m.

Effective, beginning this weekend, there will be full, 24-hour weekend curfews for New Providence and Abaco only.

The weekend curfews will begin Friday evenings at 7 o'clock and end Monday mornings at 5 o'clock.

This holiday weekend, there will be a full three-day 24-hour curfew, beginning Friday, the 9th of October at 7 p.m., to 5 a.m. Tuesday, the 13th of October.

Again, this weekend curfew will only be in effect for New Providence and Abaco.

During these weekend 24-Hour curfews, only essential services, including the uniformed branches, Customs and Immigration Departments, public health services, sanitation services and essential utility services will be permitted to operate.

Sea and airports will continue to operate and there will be no interruption to flights.

The only other movement beside essential services, will be for one hour of worship services on Saturdays and Sundays between the hours of 7 a.m. and 1 p.m.

No food stores, pharmacies, gas stations, construction sites or laundromats will be permitted to operate during the full 24-hour weekend curfews.

To the extent that this is not already the case, food distribution by the National Food Distribution Task Force will be tailored to take place during weekdays.

For New Providence and Abaco, the weekday curfew, Monday to Friday, will now be from 7 p.m. nightly to 5 a.m. the following morning.

No social gatherings will be permitted whatsoever. This will be strictly enforced in order to reduce and control the spread of COVID-19.

There is now a confidential hotline for citizens to report on people hosting social gatherings.

The hotline number is 702-9967 thru 9.

During the week, religious services may continue based on the Bahamas Christian Council guidelines approved by the Ministry of Health.

Churches may also open for individual/private prayer during the week.

Health officials have advised that the incidents of case data reveal that it is necessary to revert to the prior position regarding funerals.

As such, in addition to the officiant and the undertakers, 10 people will be permitted to attend a funeral, which may now only take place at the graveside.

Regrettably, wakes and repasts will not be permitted.

In addition to the officiant, only ten people will be permitted at a wedding. Wedding receptions will not be permitted.

I understand and fully acknowledge that these changes will be difficult for those who were planning for a larger number of individuals at weddings and funerals this weekend coming.

In order to reduce the movement of residents of New Providence, I also wish to announce that schools on New Providence and Abaco, may only proceed via virtual means.

For now, there will be no in-person schooling for students.

I also wish to advise that beaches and parks on New Providence and Abaco will once again be closed.

Exercise is permitted in one's neighborhood Monday to Friday, between 5am and 7pm.

Exercise on the weekend may take place only within an individual's yard.

Unfortunately, gyms will once again be closed. I acknowledge that they were only very recently opened. We will try to reopen them as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker:

The workplace is a major source of community spread for COVID-19.

All of those who can work from home, should do so.

We have many reports of individuals in offices not wearing masks and not maintaining physical distancing, proper sanitization and other health measures.

Such practices are helping to spread the virus.

I again make a strong appeal to those businesses that are not complying with health and safety guidelines to do so immediately.

It is the right thing to do legally and ethically.

Let me again thank the many citizens, residents and businesses, who are consistently following the health and safety guidelines.

To limit community spread in the public sector, to the greatest extent possible, public officers will be instructed by their permanent secretaries to work from home.

Cabinet Ministers in quarantine will work from home during the quarantine period.

For restaurants, for the time being, only take-away, curbside and deliveries will be permitted.

There will be no indoor or outdoor dining on New Providence and Abaco for now.

Where take away services are being provided, enforcement monitors will be vigilant to ensure that there is no congregating either indoors or outdoors by patrons.

All retail will be curbside only EXCEPT for food stores.

For all other retail, customers are not permitted to enter stores.

Gas stations are not permitted to provide in-store services.

Mr. Speaker:

As a part of our enforcement efforts, all fines for breaching health protocols, except for the mask violations, will be doubled.

To encourage compliance with public health protection measures, there will be an amendment to the Emergency Powers Order that causes businesses to be closed for business on their second violation of the Orders. They will be closed for 14 days.

If a business or construction site has an infection rate of ten percent of the full staff complement, the business or construction site will be closed, and all staff members will be quarantined for the prescribed incubation period of 14 days.

Consistent with the international guests using these facilities, Bahamians and residents seeking to book at hotels on New Providence and Abaco will be required to have negative COVID-19 RT PCR tests.

Mr. Speaker:

Health officials are setting a goal with targets and timelines that would measure the impact of the restrictive measures and the likely success of mitigating the transmission of COVID-19 in New Providence and Abaco over the next 14 days.

The ultimate measure of success would mean that the number of new cases is no longer increasing, hospitalizations are

decreasing, a reduction in the need for ICU care and a decrease in the number of COVID-19 related deaths.

The success of these measures will inform whether more restrictive measures are needed or if measures can be relaxed.

Mr. Speaker:

The measures I have outlined have no effect on air travel.

There has been no change to the current travel regime.

The opening of the international tourism sector remains set for the 1st of November 2020.

Indeed, we are also taking these measures in order to reduce our case numbers in preparation for the broader opening of the tourism sector.

Our economy was the strongest it had been in decades before COVID-19 hit.

Just like most of the world, it is going to take a very long time to recover and to work our way back.

We cannot get our economy and future back on track until we beat this pandemic.

The reality is that a massive number of jobs our country depends on are in the tourism sector.

Until tourism is back, we are going to continue to face large hurdles.

We cannot bring tourists back until COVID-19 is on the run.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask every one of our fellow countrymen and women:

For the sake of our families; for the sake of our front-line fighters; for the sake of our economy and our country; let us fight for the future by fighting COVID-19 together.

Mr. Speaker:

We are in a very particular and difficult circumstance during this flu season.

We are in the midst of a pandemic.

The additional burden of the flu season may further effect individuals and our health care system.

Because the flu season is now upon us, I make a very strong appeal for Bahamians to get a flu shot.

Please consult your doctor or a medical professional if you have any questions about the flu shot.

I will be getting a flu shot as soon as possible and encourage the members of parliament to do the same.

Mr. Speaker:

I was asked by one of my constituents why we use a number of the measures we do in fighting the virus.

When someone stays at home and they are physically distant from large numbers of people, they reduce the risk of contracting and spreading the virus.

The restrictions are not a punishment.

They are a public health tool to create more physical distancing across the community to reduce the potential to spread this very contagious virus.

Right now, on New Providence and Abaco we need everyone to come together, in a spirit of unity, to fight the current spread of the virus.

The virus likes division and disunity, both of which it exploits, doing harm to us all.

Whomever sows disunity and division, also helps to spread the virus.

So, we need all residents of the country, political parties, businesses, churches, unions, the media and civic organizations to be of one accord.

The more we cooperate, the sooner we can lift the measures and resume more normal lives.

The pandemic will be with us for some time.

We will be battling this well into next year.

What countries across the globe have learned is there will be waves and surges of the virus.

When they come we must not panic.

We must rise to the occasion as a people and do the things we need to in order to drive the numbers down.

We are all tired of this virus. We all want to be able to see our loved ones, colleagues and friends as we once did.

We must also be realistic with our current expectations.

This is the worst pandemic in 100 years.

A lack of discipline, slackness and impatience will only lead to many more deaths and even worse consequences for our economy.

In our first wave we did what we had to and brought the numbers down.

In Bimini we did what we had to and brought the numbers down.

In Grand Bahama we did what we had to and brought the numbers down.

We must take this knowledge and experience, and our present economic realities, and apply them to the current problems on New Providence and Abaco.

Let us, the residents of New Providence and Abaco, now get this done, together.

The speed at which we reduce case numbers on these islands is in our hands. Our success is in our hands.

We do not want a significant amount of virus circulating on New Providence and Abaco to get to the other islands and create problems across the entire country once again.

We will win this round in the long fight against the virus.

Let me close by making a strong appeal to social media influencers to do all you can to encourage adherence to the proper health guidelines and preventative measures, and to encourage the spirit of we are in this fight together.

I ask all Bahamians to reach out to family, friends, neighbors and colleagues to remind them that what we do together will determine our shared future.

May God bless our Bahamas, and may God grant us wisdom, discernment and fortitude.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

